

The genre-surfing British star adored by pop's A-list

Rachel Chinouriri

→ Film & Music

Hannah Einbinder **From Hacks to a queer slasher Cannes hit**



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The Guardian

Reform is 'up to its neck in sleaze', says Labour as it calls for inquiry

Jessica Elgot
Deputy political editor

Labour has accused Reform UK of being "up to its neck in sleaze" as it called on the Electoral Commission to urgently investigate substantial donations made to the party by the mother of a convicted fraudster.

Bridget Phillipson, Labour's new chair, called on the commission to examine whether any rules had been broken, after revelations in the

Guardian that George Cottrell had transferred more than \$2m (£1.48m) to his mother in the days before her donations to the party in 2024.

The commission has already made a referral to the Metropolitan police, who are looking into whether Reform may have been concealing or disguising donations derived from an "impermissible" donor.

The Guardian has since reported that Cottrell's mother, Fiona Cottrell, received several tranches of money adding up to more than \$2m, which

she attributed to her son, according to financial industry sources. Her son is a close ally and adviser to Nigel Farage.

Transfers were then made either directly to Reform or via Britain Means Business, a fundraising vehicle for the political party, according to sources.

In her letter, Phillipson said the Guardian's new revelations "may be relevant to the question of whether the true source of political donations made to Reform UK has been

'Reform don't think the rules apply to them ... They need to treat the allegations with the seriousness they deserve'

Labour spokesperson

correctly identified and whether the statutory requirements governing permissible donors have been complied with".

A Labour spokesperson said it was now time for Reform to seriously address the allegations. "If these latest claims about George Cottrell are true, Reform may have taken money from a convicted fraudster who was the ultimate source of the donations," the party said. "That would mean Reform accepted his money even though he has

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PHOTOGRAPH: RYAN LOVEJOY/PA

Wildfire in Suffolk burns near nuclear plant

Hundreds of people were evacuated and a major incident declared yesterday as a wildfire spread over more than 150 hectares on the coast of Suffolk, just a few miles from the Sizewell B nuclear power station.

Meanwhile, amid the hot, dry and windy weather in the EU, blazes continued to rage in France, Spain and a number of other countries across the Mediterranean. **News Pages 8-11** →

Uefa backs boycott of Fifa over World Cup

Nick Ames
Matt Hughes

European countries have agreed to boycott all Fifa competitions if Gianni Infantino pushes forward with his proposals to sell chunks of the World Cup to US-based private investment.

In an extraordinary development yesterday, all 55 Uefa members resolved not to participate in future World Cups or other Fifa-run events, saying in a statement that they "unanimously and unequivocally reject" the proposals.

An emergency meeting that lasted just short of two hours ended with a united front despite earlier fears that smaller countries, attracted by the money on offer through Infantino's scheme, would be swayed in favour.

Last night the culture minister, Lisa Nandy, backed Uefa, saying: "This is a principled decision that we strongly support. Football belongs to the fans, not billionaire investors. Enough is enough. It's time to take a stand to protect our game."

The prime minister, Andy Burnham, was the

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News

Mayors to break Treasury's 'death grip' with new devolution powers

Josh Halliday
 North of England editor

England's regional mayors will be able to break out of the "death grip of the Treasury" by borrowing to invest in major projects under "transformational" plans to shift power out of Whitehall.

For the first time, mayors will be able to keep a share of income tax generated in their area from 2028, as well as business rates totalling tens of millions of pounds by April 2027.

These will replace existing grants, rather than be additional money, but local leaders said it would "transform" their funding by no longer

▼ Andy Burnham has promised to move power out of Whitehall with a range of new devolved powers

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/REUTERS

relying on ringfenced Treasury hand-outs. Oliver Coppard, Labour mayor of South Yorkshire, said: "It's really important because it gets us out of the death grip of the Treasury and give us that long term certainty".

Andy Burnham will announce the measures today as part of what he called "the biggest transfer of power from Westminster in a generation".

He said: "Under our plans, more of the taxes raised in a community will stay in that community. Soon, every local leader will have the power and resources to improve public transport, build homes and create jobs."

"I know what it's like to be ignored by politicians in Westminster. I'm not going to make that same mistake."

Under a new "local first" principle, Burnham will instruct ministers to justify why powers should remain in Whitehall rather than be devolved.

As well as greater control over

technical education for teenagers, announced by the government earlier this week, some have also called for mayors to oversee schools, GPs and childcare providers through health and education commissioners.

No 10 said Britain's civil service of 520,000 would become "smaller and more strategic" as decision-making moves out of London, where one in five of these officials are based.

England's directly-elected mayors, who currently control areas spanning three-quarters of the population,

'I know what it's like to be ignored by Westminster'

Andy Burnham
 Prime minister



Burnham reveals his approach to North Sea oil and gas drilling

Peter Walker
 Senior political correspondent

Andy Burnham has said he will take a "pragmatic" approach to oil and gas drilling in the North Sea, saying the government could not ignore the potential energy resources it holds.

The prime minister's comments came in response to a question about his call with Donald Trump on his first day in No 10. Trump had said Burnham told him he would "open up" North Sea oil, although this was not mentioned in the UK call summary.

Questioned by reporters during a defence-related visit to Cumbria

about what he had said to the US president, Burnham replied: "I indicated in the phone call that we had, a week last Monday, that I would take a pragmatic approach when it comes to the North Sea, and that is my intention as we go forward. There is a resource there. When people are struggling, we can't ignore that. Hence, me indicating that to the president."

It remains unclear whether such an approach would involve allowing more drilling on existing licences or the issuing of new ones. Labour's 2024 election manifesto ruled out the latter action, and Burnham has said that he will stick to the promises made in the document.

Any move to even stretch the manifesto pledge would probably anger a number of Labour MPs, including Ed Miliband, the former energy secretary, who is now foreign secretary.

This is particularly the case given Burnham's hint toward a more relaxed approach came on the same day firefighters battled a major heathland fire in Suffolk and a day after half of England was declared to be officially in drought.

Zack Polanski, the leader of the Green party in England and Wales, condemned Burnham's comments, saying it was particularly alarming during a period of drought and wildfires. "Allowing new oil and gas drilling in the North Sea will worsen the climate breakdown," said Polanski.

"It's not too late for Burnham to do the right thing and commit to leaving dangerous fossil fuels in the ground."

would be able to use the revenue generated from business rates and income tax as they wish, including tax breaks for key industries or rebates to residents.

However, experts said one of the most significant consequences was that it would allow combined authorities to take out 30-year loans against their projected income to fund major projects that previously needed Treasury approval.

Mayors said they were currently prevented from funding huge initiatives on housing and transport because they cannot take out private loans on the basis of one-year funding settlements from Whitehall.

Henri Murison, chief executive of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, said the change "completely transforms" what combined authorities would be able to do.

It is not yet clear what proportion of income tax or business rates would be retained by combined authorities, with officials still working on the numbers. John Healey, the chancellor, is expected to set out the detail in the autumn budget.

Ben Houchen, the Conservative mayor of Tees Valley, suggested he would use the income tax to hand out tax rebates to residents.

However, it is understood that this would be technically extremely difficult, given mayors do not know how much individuals have paid in tax. Also, the income tax revenue is not additional money for mayors - it is replacing government grants - so is more likely to be spent on long-term projects than giveaways to residents.

Ministers are considering ways to ensure less-economically productive areas are not left behind.

This could include economic powerhouses like Manchester and London sharing a portion of the revenue they generate.

Think-tanks including IPPR North had warned that rushing ahead with fiscal devolution risked creating a "two-tier England", potentially leaving behind roughly quarter of the country's population that do not have a mayoral authority.

The government is planning to encourage these areas - spanning millions of people in Dorset, Somerset, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, and parts of Kent - to form mayoral authorities in order to benefit from greater autonomy.

Official consultations are still taking place on what to do with the Jackdaw gasfield, east of Aberdeen, and the Rosebank oil and gasfield, west of Shetland. Campaigners have warned that approving these would break the manifesto pledge.

There is speculation that some new projects could be allowed if they are so-called tiebacks, where new fields are connected to already-approved facilities through pipelines.

Miliband once described Rosebank as "climate vandalism". Miatta Fahnbulleh, who replaced him as energy secretary, has expressed similar views, but has also said she will be pragmatic about the idea of drilling.

Speaking on Wednesday about his conversation with Burnham, Trump said: "Well, he did say one very good thing. He said he's going to open up North Sea oil. If he does that, you're going to be a wealthy country."



Olivia Dean

Raye, left, and Suede's Brett Anderson

Cream of pop talent old and new shortlisted for this year's Mercury prize

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

In a history going back to 1992, the Mercury prize has honoured a formidable array of chart-topping A-listers, but it has taken until this year's awards for Paul McCartney to get his first nomination.

McCartney, who is nominated for the award for his album *The Boys of Dungeon Lane*, an affecting look back at his Liverpool childhood and his burgeoning friendships with his Beatles bandmates.

Speaking to the Guardian as the album was released, McCartney said he felt the presence of John Lennon when writing it. "My collaborator was probably one of the best writers of the century, so, yeah, you're going

to miss him. But when I write [about a specific place], I kind of know he would've known it. I can gauge his reaction: 'That's good, stick that in.'"

McCartney may have the greatest pedigree of anyone up for the prize, which honours the best album of the year by a British or Irish artist, but he is up against one of the most sensational British success stories of recent years: Olivia Dean, whose album *The Art of Loving* swept the board at the Brit awards and could do the same at next year's Grammys. It has spent all but one of its 43 weeks since release in the UK Top 5, eight of them at No 1.

Her British pop peer Raye is alongside her, for the ambitious, symphonic-scale *This Music May Contain Hope*, her second album in a row to be nominated after her debut, *My 21st Century Blues*.

Another big hitter is the rapper Dave, nominated for *The Boy Who Played the Harp*, containing the global smash *Raindance*. The album was awarded five stars in the Guardian, with Dave described as "a fantastically smart, sharp lyricist". Dave won the Mercury prize with his debut album *Psychodrama* in 2019, but didn't make the shortlist for its follow-up, *We're All in This Together*.

Florence + the Machine earns her fourth Mercury nomination, for her sixth album, *Everybody Scream*, which was also acclaimed by the Guardian and described as "rounded musically and emotionally". If she loses, only Radiohead would have been nominated more times without winning.

There is a panoply of other big names on a rare compilation album

to be nominated for the Mercury: *Help(2)*, a charity album recorded to raise money for War Child.

It features new recordings by artists including the former Mercury winners Arctic Monkeys, Pulp, Sampha, English Teacher, Ezra Collective, Young Fathers and Beth Gibbons - who won with Portishead - plus a host of other top UK and US talent. It is the sequel to 1995's *The Help Album*, the only other compilation to be nominated in Mercury history.

All of the aforementioned albums reached No 1 in the UK, while another reached No 3: *That's Showbiz Baby!* by Jade, whose post-Little Mix career continues to win acclaim.

The goth-tinged Britpopers Suede are nominated for another commercial success, *Antidepressants*, which reached No 2; the band

won the Mercury for their self-titled 1993 debut, but haven't been nominated since 1997's *Coming Up*.

There is space for less well-known artists, including an album that could be seen as the dark horse: *Blizzard*, by the Irish singer-songwriter Dove Ellis, which received some of 2025's most rapturous reviews across the music press. He also appears on *Help(2)*.

The jazz outfit Knats are nominated for *A Great Day in Newcastle*, which features a huge cast of musicians, including spoken-word artists, combining for a grand, groove-driven listen. As natives of Newcastle where the award ceremony is now held, they'll be hoping for a repeat of last year when local boy Sam Fender was given the prize.

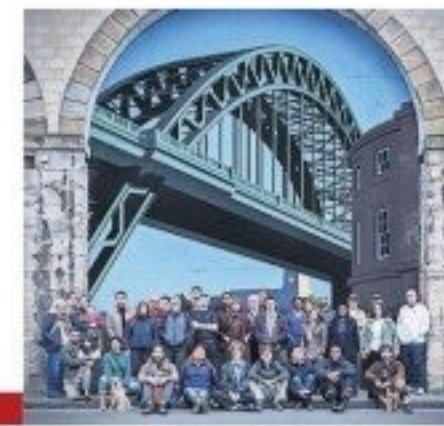
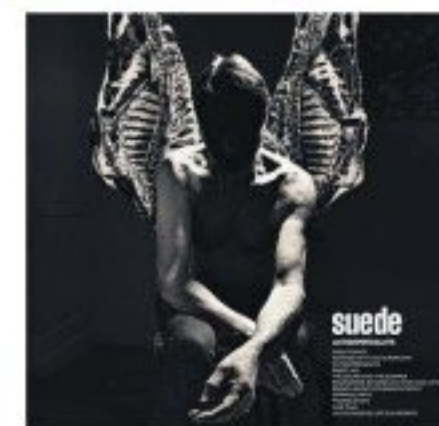
The UK rapper Kojey Radical, celebrated for his cerebral, socially conscious yet commercially minded tracks, earned his second Mercury nomination, while Nia Archives - a producer and DJ who combines junglist rhythms with indie rock and R&B - also earned her second nomination, for *Emotional Junglist*, released only last week, on the last day of the eligibility period.

It adds up to a diverse list where eight of the 12 albums feature artists of colour. There are of course some snubs, most notably Lily Allen's *West End Girl*, which was a huge part of 2025's cultural conversation.

The prize will be awarded at Newcastle's Utilita Arena on 22 October, and the winner will be decided by an 11-strong panel of experts from across the music industry.

The 2026 Mercury prize nominees

Below, clockwise from top left: **Olivia Dean** *The Art of Loving*; **Suede** *Antidepressants*; **Kojey Radical** *Don't Look Down*; **Raye** *This Music May Contain Hope*; **Nia Archives** *Emotional Junglist*; **Baby Knats** *A Great Day in Newcastle*. Bottom: **Dave** *The Boy Who Played the Harp*; **Jade** *That's Showbiz Baby*; **Paul McCartney** *The Boys of Dungeon Lane*; **Dove Ellis** *Blizzard*; **War Child Records** *Help(2)*; **Florence + the Machine** *Everybody Scream*



Dove Ellis

Dave

Paul McCartney



Labour says Reform is 'up to its neck in sleaze' and demands donations inquiry

Continued from page 1

never shown he was legally allowed to donate to a political party at the time. With every passing day it's clearer that Reform think the rules don't apply to them. They need to wake up and start treating these allegations with the seriousness they deserve and come clean about who is really bankrolling the party."

The party spokesperson said Reform was "up to [its] neck in sleaze and dodgy money".

At a press conference yesterday, Reform's economics spokesperson, Robert Jenrick, ducked specific questions about the donations.

In testy exchanges with reporters, he said the story "has been going on for a long time", but he did not engage with the substance of the allegations.

He told the BBC: "We are entirely confident that Reform followed all electoral rules at the time when the donations were made. Of course, we'll participate with any inquiries. To the best of my knowledge, we haven't even been contacted by the police, so I don't think we have anything more to add to that."

Jenrick suggested that journalists should be questioning George Cottrell, and said they should return to the intended subject matter of the press conference, which was social care. "Reform is certain that all the electoral rules were followed," he told

ITV. "If you've got a question for Mr Cottrell then I think you have to direct that to him."

The Met's investigation is examining donations to Reform, including those from Britain Means Business, a fundraising vehicle whose director is the party's deputy leader, Richard Tice. The firm gave Reform two donations of £250,000 in the run-up to the 2024 general election. These were first revealed by the Guardian.

Cottrell, who was convicted of fraud in the US, now lives in Montenegro but is seen often alongside Farage. He has previously been described as Farage's chief of staff

but Reform has maintained that he is only a volunteer.

Asked about the transfers, lawyers for Cottrell said their client had no further comment.

In previous legal correspondence, Cottrell has not denied giving his mother - who is understood to be of relatively modest means - large sums. Instead, he said via lawyers that "any political donations his mother has made have been entirely her own decision, and are a matter for her".

Fiona Cottrell has not responded to several attempts by the Guardian to contact her.

Asked on Wednesday for a response to the story, a Reform spokesperson said: "Reform takes pride in its stringent vetting of donations and always ensures that the Electoral Commission guidelines on donations, as set out in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, are strictly followed, as has been the case with all donations."

Farage is fighting a byelection after resigning his seat of Clacton. All other mainstream parties have declined to stand a candidate against him, though there are 34 people on the ballot paper, including novelty candidates such as Count Binface.



▲ Nigel Farage at a rally in Norfolk this month. His party says it vets donations carefully

PHOTOGRAPH: JOE GIDDENS/PA

Honest Bob got genuinely snappy and tetchy. Why couldn't people ask him the questions he wanted them to?

◀ Robert Jenrick at a press conference called to discuss social care reform. He ducked questions about party donations

PHOTOGRAPH: TOLGA AKMEN/EPA

Sketch
John Crace



Even GB News cringes as Jenrick offers up his latest exercise in self-destruction

When you've lost the trust of GB News, when you're too deranged, too extreme and too outright mendacious for your biggest fan, then you know you are in trouble. You can almost sense the panic

beginning to set in at Reform HQ.

No longer topping the opinion polls. A new prime minister resetting the dial, the public increasingly choosing optimism over grievance. A party mired in financial sleaze. A leader turning into a laughing stock in his head-to-head with a dustbin. It was never meant to be this way for Reform. They thought they were the winners.

With Nigel Farage locked away on a self-imposed witness protection programme, Richard Tice on an Accountancy for Dummies course and Zia Yusuf on a never-ending anger management retreat, the Reform front-of-house recess duties have been left to Robert Jenrick. Which is just the way Honest Bob likes it.

Yesterday morning brought Honest Bob's latest exercise in self-destruction. Giving a speech in a large hall, rammed with about ... er ... eight people. The only person in the room who actually wanted to be there was Honest Bob himself. Sometimes, you have to wonder if it's all a game on his part. What he wanted to talk about today was Andy Burnham's "death tax", which doesn't even exist yet other than as a vague possibility to be considered among other options. But for Honest Bob, it was as if it had already been implemented.

Already HMRC inspectors were hovering around hospices, terrifying dying patients by stealing their wedding rings, confiscating their debit cards and laughing as they emptied their houses and their bank accounts.

This was Honest Bob's wish fulfilment. There's nothing that excites him more than misery porn.

Honest Bob droned on for the best part of 20 minutes. Making specious argument after specious argument. Knocking down countless straw men.

The first question came from GB News, more in sorrow than in anger. Why had Honest Bob made such a fool of himself? Why not actually try to join in the cross-party talks to find a solution to such a serious problem? Why the scare tactics of a death tax that isn't even government policy?

For the first time, Honest Bob looked rattled. It hadn't occurred to him that GB News might desert him. He had believed them to be on the side of grievance and division.

It was all downhill from there. Few other media organisations could be bothered to engage with the half-arsed grandstanding. They were more interested in following up the Guardian's story of Posh George transferring £2m to his mum moments before she sent money to Thick Dicky.

Now Honest Bob got genuinely snappy and tetchy. Why couldn't people ask him the questions he wanted them to? Where was the respect he deserved?

He had nothing to say on the money transfer other than he was sure everything was above board. Of course it was. We had his word for it. Daddy had just been indulging George.

Much more of this and the wheels will come off entirely.

Odyssey argument

Criticism of film lacks respect, says author

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Fool's mate?

All-female chess team ordered to add a man

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National

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More people recalled to jail than are being released, MoJ figures show

Jessica Murray

Social affairs correspondent

More people were recalled to prison than were released during the first three months of 2026, the first time on record the "recall rate" has surpassed 100% in England and Wales.

Between January and March 2026, 12,977 people were released from prison while 13,193 people were returned for breaching their licence conditions, up 31% from last year, Ministry of Justice data showed.

This means that for every 100 people released, 101 people were recalled to custody, creating a "recall rate" of over 100%.

The rate has increased rapidly from about 30% a decade ago. Between January and March 2016, 17,923 people were released and 5,185 were recalled, meaning about 30 were recalled for every 100 prisoners released. Prisons in England and Wales are close to capacity, and the government has recently paused its plans to release about 6,000 prisoners early to ease the crisis.

Andy Keen-Downs, the chief executive of the Prison Advice and Care Trust, said: "The prison population crisis will not be solved if as many people are being sent back to prison as are leaving it."

He warned that if circumstances do not change, prison places may run out by Christmas.

"Hundreds of people are recalled every month not because they have committed new offences, but because they have fallen foul of licence conditions," he said. "This makes little sense at a time when the government is doing everything it can to reduce pressure on the prison system."

In total, 51,419 prisoners were recalled to jail in the year to March 2026 after breaching the terms of their licence, up 28% from the previous 12 months and the highest number since current records began in 2015. Of all recalls, 22% involved a further charge of offending, while the vast majority were for breaches of licence conditions. They include failing to keep in touch with probation services or failing to reside at an approved address.

The figures also showed 70,066 prisoners have been freed early since September 2024, when the government brought in emergency measures in response to overcrowding.

The MoJ said the increase was probably due in part to early release schemes, under which more prisoners have been released on licence earlier in their sentences.



PHOTOGRAPH:
JEFF J MITCHELL/
GETTY IMAGES

Poised for a big birthday celebration Zippos circus performers inside the big top at Kirkintilloch, East Dunbartonshire. The circus was founded by Martin "Zippo" Burton in 1986, with its first performances at Highbury Fields in north London. It is celebrating its 40th anniversary with a special tour which runs until October.

UK-funded riot police in France used teargas on asylum seekers

Rajeev Syal

Home affairs editor

French riot police funded by UK taxpayers used teargas on asylum seekers in an attempt to stop them boarding a boat in which three women were later found dead, a charity has claimed.

Footage and photographs seen by the Guardian show CS gas canisters being fired towards groups of people on Plage du Braek near Dunkirk at 4am yesterday. At 6am, three women were found dead in a boat near the same beach.

According to the charity Utopia 56, which took the images, staff saw French riot police firing the canisters at people who were trying to board the same boat in which the bodies were discovered.

As part of a £660m agreement signed by Shabana Mahmood in May,

50 officers from Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (CRS) "specially trained in the use of riot and crowd control tactics" have been deployed, funded by UK public money.

In a separate development, a fourth person – a man – also died yesterday when his dinghy got into difficulty in a separate incident off the coast of Dannes. The incidents happened hours after the busiest day for small boat crossings so far this year when 752 people arrived in the UK.

Clashes between riot police and asylum seekers took place on roads leading to Plage du Braek from 4am, the charity said.

Angèle Vettorello, a coordinator at Utopia 56, said: "An hour before the boat carrying the women's bodies was found, our team was right next to the beach."

"Riot officers from the CRS were there and were trying to stop 80 people, including families, from

trying to access the beach and those people were trying to get inside the boat. We saw them using teargas against people and later we found at least 35 teargas canisters there."

"We do not know if the women whose bodies were discovered were already in the boat or were part of the group trying to reach the beach."

"We can see police pressure on the beach is putting more people at risk. We saw it last week and we are seeing it now and we have seen it for some time. It is terrible."

The CRS has faced allegations of brutality and racism. In February, nine officers from the force were found guilty of beating peaceful

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The number of people who arrived by a small boat crossing yesterday – the busiest day of the year so far

protesters who were sheltering from teargas during the gilets jaunes anti-government demonstrations in 2018. Two years ago, leaked WhatsApp messages showed CRS officers had exchanged an image of a sinking small boat laden with migrants.

The CRS, although paid for by the UK, maintains "operational independence" in France and is also authorised to use water cannon, stun grenades and batons.

Imran Hussain, director of external affairs at the Refugee Council, said: "Refugees are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, and those who risk dangerous small boat journeys do so only out of desperation. Fewer refugees would risk crossings if the government created safe pathways."

More than 900 people have crossed the Channel in the past week as people smugglers took advantage of a calm sea. A total of 13,376 migrants have crossed this year, down from 24,389 at the same point last year.

A government spokesperson said: "We are deeply saddened to hear about these deaths. Every death in the Channel is a tragedy and a stark reminder of the dangers posed by criminal gangs exploiting vulnerable people for profit."

European countries agree to boycott Fifa contests over World Cup proposal

Continued from page 1

first politician to criticise Fifa's plan, writing on X on Tuesday evening that the World Cup "was never anyone's to sell".

European football associations are expected to write to Fifa this week with a formal notification of their threat to boycott future tournaments unless the planned World Cup sell-off is withdrawn.

It means Infantino faces an uphill battle to push his plan forward. Countries had been given until 19 September to sign up but there will now be significant pressure to drastically revise his scheme or withdraw it completely. While the majority of European FAs had submitted letters of support in favour of his re-election next March, such a decisive line in the sand from Uefa weakens his position dramatically.

Uefa's statement confirmed the decision. "As a result of today's discussion, no Uefa national teams will participate in any Fifa competition for so long as these proposals remain alive, unless this proposal has been abandoned in its entirety and binding assurances have been given that Fifa will never again open its governance or competitions to private ownership," it read.

The meeting yesterday was introduced by the Uefa president, Aleksander Ceferin, with executive committee members and Uefa's Fifa council representatives also addressing delegates. Those early speeches are understood to have set the tone, with around 20 further FA heads taking the floor and sources describing an atmosphere of "unity".

Among those to offer their view was Debbie Hewitt, the president of the FA, who one attender said gave a "very tough" exposition in favour



▲ Gianni Infantino and Donald Trump hand the World Cup trophy to the Spanish team this month
PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD SELLERS/ALLSTAR

'We oppose Fifa's plans - the World Cup belongs to football and always will'

FA spokesperson

of a boycott. That was backed up in a statement by an FA spokesperson that read: "We stand shoulder to shoulder with our European colleagues and fully support the collective view. We oppose Fifa's plans - the Fifa World Cup belongs to football and always will."

Along the lines spelt out by Uefa, at senior level the proposed boycott would begin with next year's Women's World Cup, while the first age-group Fifa tournament to be boycotted is likely to be the Under-20 Women's World Cup. It is due to take place in Poland from



Aleksander Ceferin
Uefa's president

5 September with six of the 24 competitors, including England, due to represent Uefa countries.

England's women's team also have a World Cup qualifying playoff tie against Greece in October, which would be a major test of the FA's resolve if Fifa refused to back down.

The European governing body invited other confederations to follow their lead. Uefa are understood to be confident that a number of Asian countries, in particular, are similarly minded.

Infantino's strongholds traditionally lie outside Europe and a collapse in support elsewhere could have severe consequences for the Fifa president.

"National associations around the world are now presented with an ultimatum: accept the irreversible capture of football's greatest competitions or bear the consequences," Uefa said. "This is not a 'democratic decision', but governance by intimidation - an act of coercion unworthy of an institution entrusted with the stewardship of the global game."

Sources within European football believe Uefa's decision increases the chances of a Europe-backed candidate running against Infantino in next year's Fifa election, which he had been expected to sail through without opposition.

Uefa has also held talks with the North American confederation Concacaf, who have expressed their opposition to Fifa's plans but have yet to announce their support for a boycott.

The 41 Concacaf nations arranged their own emergency meeting last night to discuss their response to the crisis.

A number of European national associations are understood to have held talks with their respective governments over the matter, many of whom have backed a boycott in private.

The Liberal Democrat sport spokeswoman, Anna Sabine, also backed the boycott and called for Uefa to go further and create "a new global footballing body built on accountability and transparency that puts fans first".

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RootMetrics



◀ Christopher Nolan's film of Homer's epic poem has won widespread acclaim, but Emily Wilson said its writing was 'abysmal'

PHOTOGRAPH: MELINDA SUE GORDON/UNIVERSAL

Oates calls out 'crude' criticism of Nolan's *Odyssey* by translator

Catherine Shoard

The off-screen drama surrounding Christopher Nolan's blockbuster version of *The Odyssey* stepped up a gear overnight, as the novelist Joyce Carol Oates sought to defend the filmmaker from criticism by the classicist Emily Wilson.

Writing on X, Oates took issue with the style as well as the rhetoric of Wilson's essay, published this week in the *London Review of Books*, in which the academic, who published a translation of Homer's epic poem in 2017, wrote that Nolan's film lacked "psychological, emotional, political and ethical depth" and had "nothing convincing to say".

"Rather than disagreeing with interpretations of Homer in a collegial manner," said Oates, "this person, who has benefited enormously from

Nolan's film, speaks in the crude language of Maga folks attacking someone with ideas that differ from hers.

"One would expect a translator, of all people, beholden to a text, in service to a text, to be just a wee bit more thoughtful and respectful of others who are acting in good faith just as (she would claim) she is."

Oates's comments come in the wake of her own implied criticism of the film last week, when she compared it with a 1997 Hallmark Channel version and found it wanting. The author tweeted that the TV movie made by Andrei Konchalovsky boasted a "much more interesting interpretation" of the sexual dynamic between Circe and Odysseus.

She also praised its portrayal of Odysseus ("So manly, so fully human"), its haides interlude ("mesmerising") and its comparative expansiveness.

Nolan's film has been widely applauded by critics, perhaps partly explaining why the pitch of Wilson's objections shocked many. "I had hoped that Nolan's affinity with these Homeric themes might push him to new creative heights, and enable him to conjure more believable characters," she wrote.

"But *The Odyssey* features his usual combination of grandiosity

and superficiality ... the film's vision is too confused, its characters too underdeveloped, to deliver what it half-promises in terms of big ideas - although it is very good at conveying big bangs and big giants."

She added: "The writing is abysmal. None of the characters has a convincing motivation for their actions or words. There are no sex scenes, and the food looks horrible."

The classicist's verdict was eagerly anticipated, as her translation had been praised by Nolan. The director told *Empire* magazine he had used the opening line of her version - "Tell me about a complicated man" - as a key reference point when constructing the character of Odysseus.

Sales of Wilson's translation, and those by others, have risen significantly over the past month, with the bookseller TG Jones also reporting a 1,560% rise in searches for *The Iliad*.

However, no royalties from the film would have been paid to any writer other than Nolan himself.

Nolan's previous film, *Oppenheimer*, a biopic of the man behind the atomic bomb, swept the 2023 Oscars, winning seven awards. His follow-up is widely predicted to follow suit.

The Guardian contacted Wilson for comment.



Joyce Carol Oates took issue with Wilson's remarks

Child road-crossing casualties much higher in deprived areas

Gwyn Topham

Transport correspondent

The number of children killed or injured crossing roads is almost five times higher in England's most deprived areas than its wealthiest, official analysis suggests.

Department for Transport figures show a widening gap over the past 10 years in road casualties between

those living in the poorest 10% of postcodes and the most affluent 10%.

The number of people reported killed or seriously injured across Great Britain's roads rose to 29,918 in 2025, 2,432 of whom were under 16. The total was 3% above the 2022-24 average. Fatalities fell 4% to 1,538.

DfT analysis of where the most serious accidents in England occurred showed stark differences in the proportion of casualties from poorer and

wealthier areas, particularly among younger people.

More than 20% of child pedestrians killed or injured lived in the most deprived 10% of areas, compared with 4% living in the least deprived, according to the DfT report on deprivation and road casualties in England.

Campaigners said the 14% rise - from 325 deaths in 2024 to 372 last year - needed a response.

Rebecca Guy of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents said: "If the government is serious about reducing road deaths and serious injuries, tackling inequality must be at the heart of its approach."

"That means targeting investment and prevention efforts toward the communities at greatest risk."

Speeding was a factor in 52% of recorded deaths on Great Britain's roads last year. More than three-quarters of those killed across all types of accidents were male.

Motorways were statistically the safest roads per mile travelled in 2025 - accounting for only 6% of fatalities despite carrying 21% of traffic.

The DfT said: "Our road safety strategy, the first in over a decade, recognises that people from deprived areas can face higher risks on the road. That's why it aims to reduce deaths and serious injuries for all road users."

Greek police investigating case of Scottish woman found dead in suitcase

PA Media

Toxicology tests are being carried out to establish whether foul play was involved in the death of a Scottish woman whose body was found in a suitcase in Greece.

The body of Elisabeth-Jane Ross, 38, was discovered by a homeless man in a derelict building in the Kypseli area of Athens on 18 July.

She is believed to have died between five and seven days before she was found.

According to local media, Ross travelled to Greece from Edinburgh on 29 June, and initially stayed with friends in Keratsini, in the suburbs of Athens, before meeting American friends in Kypseli.

It has been reported that Greek police believe her phone was used to send messages after her death, in an apparent attempt to put people looking for her off the scent.

Ross is understood to be from the Edinburgh area. Greek police are trying to establish whether her death was the result of a "criminal act", with a police spokesperson confirming toxicology tests were being carried out.

The spokesperson added there was no evidence on either the body or the suitcase that would enable them to identify a third party.

According to local reports, police were also trying to trace where her phone had been in the days after her death.

A spokesperson for Greek police said: "No other evidence has emerged from the body or the suitcase that would allow us to identify another person."

"We are awaiting the result of toxicology tests to determine the cause of death, and ascertain whether foul play was involved."

"The investigation is ongoing."

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said: "Our thoughts are with Elisabeth's family during this difficult time. We are providing consular support and are in contact with the local authorities."

A Police Scotland spokesperson said: "We are aware of the death of a Scottish woman in Athens and are liaising with authorities in Greece."

"Officers are providing support to her family in Scotland."



▲ The body of Elisabeth-Jane Ross was found in Athens on 18 July



▼ Smoke rises from the wildfire at Dunwich Heath, near Leiston, as a major incident was declared

PHOTOGRAPH: JOE GIDDENS/PA WIRE

Hundreds evacuated in Suffolk after 'apocalyptic' wildfire near nuclear plant

Pippa Neill
Caroline Davies

Hundreds of people were evacuated and a major incident declared yesterday as a wildfire spread over more than 150 hectares on the coast of Suffolk, just a few miles from the nuclear power station Sizewell B.

The fire was still not completely under control as of last night, according to Jon Lacey, chief fire officer, Suffolk fire and rescue.

He said: "The wind change has helped a little bit, unexpectedly, and also the helicopter is helping to dampen the fire down."

"Whether it's actually under control, I wouldn't commit myself to that just yet, but we are surrounded by resources to protect the property and life."

Andy Burnham promised support to firefighters yesterday. Speaking to PA Media reporters during a visit to Cumbria, he said: "We've got the situation under close monitoring, and I'm receiving regular updates. It is a very serious incident."

According to the Met Office, Suffolk has received only 2% of its average monthly rainfall for July.

The wildfire came the day after half of England was declared to be officially in drought, including East Anglia and six other areas. Yesterday Natural Resources Wales declared a drought across Wales, which is on course for its driest July since records began nearly 200 years ago.

As the climate crisis supercharges "whiplash" wet-then-dry weather, UK and Europe are seeing back-to-back heatwaves that encourage vegetation but then dry



◀ The fire was still not completely under control last night after the fire service was called on Wednesday

PHOTOGRAPH: SUFFOLK FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

it out, producing ideal fuel for fires. So far this month, firefighters have responded to 393 wildfires across England and Wales, making July the busiest month on record and placing significant pressure on crews and

resources across the fire and rescue service.

Phil Garrigan, chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), said: "Wildfires are no longer isolated or seasonal events. They are becoming

a recurring feature of the risks facing our communities and emergency services. As climate and environmental conditions change, we must ensure our fire and rescue services are equipped to meet that challenge."

In France the fires around Bordeaux continue to smoulder, while Spain and now Turkey are dealing with fires of their own.

In Suffolk the fire and rescue services were called to reports of a fire at Dunwich Heath, near Leiston at 5.30pm on Wednesday and that night a number of local homes were evacuated. Rob Tucker, who owns a holiday cottage at Cliff House Holiday Park, said: "We were evacuated at 10pm

'Immense strain' England on track for record number of heat-related deaths

Damian Carrington
Environment editor

England is on track to record its highest ever number of heat-related deaths this summer after the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) said an estimated extra 2,877 people had died in the May and June heatwaves.

The record was set in 2022 with

2,985 deaths, and August, traditionally the hottest month, is yet to arrive.

The health secretary, Yvette Cooper, said yesterday: "My thoughts are with all those who have lost loved ones as a result of the long and intense heatwaves."

The UKHSA analysis estimated there were 753 heat-related deaths in the heatwave from 24 to 27 May, and a further 2,124 between 21 and 28

June. The total is almost double the figure for the whole summer in 2025.

The UKHSA estimate is based on recorded deaths. It calculates excess mortality during the heatwaves compared with mortality levels at similar times of the year that did not experience heatwaves. The figures are similar to an earlier estimate based on data showing the link between heat and deaths in the past.

Heatwaves are made more intense and more likely by the fossil fuel-driven climate crisis; the heatwave that affected western Europe at the end of last month was the most severe and widespread ever recorded. The heat in 2027 will be exacerbated by a super El Niño weather system and

temperatures will continue to rise until carbon emissions are cut.

"The new figures highlight the significant danger that very hot weather can pose to people's health," said Dr Ross Thompson, principal environmental public health scientist at UKHSA. "As the climate becomes warmer, we can expect periods of hot weather to become longer, more frequent and more extreme."

"That's why it's vital that individuals, communities and systems are prepared to deal with higher temperatures, and to ensure those most vulnerable are protected."

Cooper said this summer's heat was having "an increasingly serious impact on the health of thousands of

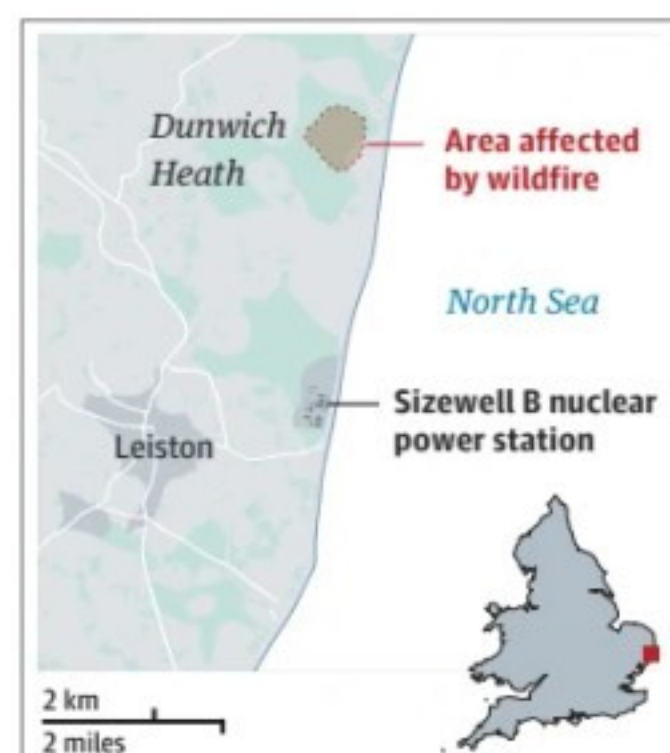
people, and on the pressures facing our NHS too".

She added: "My heartfelt thanks go to the NHS staff, care workers and emergency responders who have worked tirelessly through these exceptionally busy and challenging months to protect and care for people affected by the heat."

Some ambulance services reported a record number of calls during the heatwaves.

During the June heatwave in England a new high temperature for the month, of 38C, was recorded at Lingwood, Norfolk, while the 31.5C recorded at Kew Gardens in May was a new record for that month.

Dr Garyfallos Konstantinoudis,



yesterday. One of the guys at Holiday Park came along and said we were being evacuated."

Yesterday a nearby caravan park was also evacuated and local residents opened up their homes.



31.5C

The record temperature for May seen at Kew, west London, which is home to the Climate Change Oak

Andrew Turner, chair of Westleton parish council, told the Guardian: "I had two families in my house. Two families and two dogs. There are now pillows and stuff in the village hall but the objective is to get everyone into houses. The council is still taking names of people who are willing to put up rooms."

"We're a tight-knit community. It's great to see the community come together. I wouldn't expect anything less."

The damage to wildlife in the area, however, is expected to be considerable as part of the fire was on RSPB Minsmere nature reserve. Local RSPB area manager Adam Rowlands said: "The heathland habitat where the main fire is, is home to really special and rare species in the UK, birds such as nightjars, nightingales, Dartford warbler. It's absolutely devastating to see this damage compared to last night when the fire started, I saw a 20ft fireball burning through the trees, with nightjars flying away from the fireball."

"Last night I stood on the heath and it was apocalyptic, the sky was orange, the smoke was billowing, it could be seen and smelled 20 miles to the north of the sight."

Firefighters have said there is not thought to be any danger to the nuclear power station Sizewell B, which sits a few miles away.

An EDF spokesperson said the wildfire was not affecting operations at the power station. It is understood that Sizewell B has an emergency plan in place that covers a range of scenarios including a fire on site.

People have been urged to avoid the area where possible and keep windows and doors closed.

Dr Zakary Campbell-Lochrie, a lecturer in fire science at the University of Edinburgh, said: "This wildfire is occurring at the same time as drought conditions have officially been declared in large parts of England, including Suffolk. The hot, dry weather conditions, including the multiple heatwave events across much of the UK in recent weeks, lead to strong drying conditions for vegetation, which can subsequently be highly susceptible to ignition and can present a much greater danger when fires do occur."

The climate crisis, driven by the burning of fossil fuels, is making heatwaves more intense and more likely. Yesterday the UK Health Security Agency said that England was on track to record its highest ever number of heat-related deaths this summer.

of Imperial College London and co-author of the earlier study, said: "The UKHSA's analysis provides clear, tragic confirmation of the significant health impact these heatwaves had across England and Wales."

"Extended periods of extreme heat place immense strain on the human body. Let's not forget that behind these numbers are real people who died too soon."

"We must take urgent action to adapt our homes, care settings and infrastructure, while doubling down on global efforts to reach net zero and stop temperatures rising further."

There may be small changes to the UKHSA estimate when full death records are available.

The grass is greener

Venues that avoid the hosepipe ban anger locals

Helena Horton

After multiple punishing heatwaves, and no rain in parts for over a month, it seems the whole of the south of England is golden brown.

But close to Hammersmith Bridge in Barnes, south-west London, there is the unmistakable scent of damp soil. The playing fields of St Paul's school, where fees are up to £57,000 a year, are a bright, lush green.

The neatly trimmed grass looks like a mirage in the otherwise parched landscape. It has been a shock to appalled residents, who are under a hosepipe ban and have to let their own lawns die.

In England, 40% of the population is under a hosepipe ban, with seven water firms - Affinity Water, Anglian Water, Cambridge Water, Southern Water, South East Water, Thames Water and South West Water - all restricting use. But there are exemptions for golf courses, sports pitches and school playing fields, meaning there are pockets of green while vegetation in public parks dies.

It seems the bans came too late; the lack of water across the country means half of England is now in drought. This is despite the fact some parts of the country had the wettest start to the year on record.

Elsewhere in south-west London, families were desperately trying to keep their children cool during school holidays. Young children could be seen huddled under trees in the shade on Tooting Bec Common, which has been scorched by the sun to the extent that the grass has died, leaving bare, hard soil.

Parents with young children are unable to fill paddling pools to keep them cool, as temperatures have hit 30C or above on 24 separate occasions so far this summer.

But the school, despite being closed for the summer, is allowed to keep its lawns verdant due to a loophole that allows schools to water their pitches for "health and safety" reasons.

"They should be under the same rules as the rest of us," says 62-year-old Steve Barker, who was stopping to mop his brow while on a walk along the Thames. "Why are they watering the playing fields when they aren't even using them? It isn't



▲ The heatwave and a hosepipe ban leave the grass scorched at Tooting Bec Common, south London, while the fields at St Paul's School, in Barnes, are green

PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GODWIN/ THE GUARDIAN

term-time! It definitely looks better than my grass - I've had to let it die, and it is probably too late to save it now. They must be using a lot of water to keep it all so green."

While the contrast between the lush green of St Paul's and the withering hydrangeas of the local community gardens is sharp, it is by no means unique: similar tensions are arising across the south. On the coast of Sandwich Bay in Kent, there are patches of bright green among the parched heathland. This is the exclusive Royal St George's Golf Club, which hosts the Open Championship.

The club allows membership only by recommendation by other members. Visitors can attend on some occasions throughout the year for about £400 a day.

South East Water customers in the county are under a hosepipe ban, and the parks in Kent have gone brown.

Dulwich college in south London, the £67,000-a-year school that counts Nigel Farage among its alumni, has also been keeping its acres of sports pitches lush, using powerful sprinklers. The school has said it is "using water as conservatively as possible".

It broke up for summer earlier this month, but continues to keep its sports pitches well watered. The community gardens in nearby Brockwell Park, however, cannot be properly watered.

That pattern has intensified demands for a change in the water system, to iron out these

inequalities and stop the need for as many hosepipe bans.

Helena Dollimore, the Labour MP for Hastings and Rye, said: "Hosepipe ban exemptions for golf courses and private school sports pitches symbolise everything wrong with our water system. How can it be right that a private school can use hundreds of litres of water to keep the grass green in the middle of the summer holidays, but children cannot play in their paddling pools?"

"These are the consequences of consecutive Conservative governments selling off our most precious resource to create a system that benefits shareholders."

Cat Hobbs, founder and director of the campaign group We Own It, said the inequality was "shocking". She added: "Private school playing fields are staying lush and green while everywhere else, flowers wilt, parks go brown and kids can't stay cool in the padding pool."

Hobbs thinks that "public ownership is crucial to manage our water properly, cut leaks and stop unfair exemptions like this". In Barnes, anger at the private school's lush green lawns has reached fever pitch. The school is hurriedly writing a letter to its neighbours to explain why the water is being used.

Danielle Pierce, the estates manager, said: "We are watering our sports pitches, not the wider grounds, in line with Thames Water's published guidance."

"This water comes from a dedicated standpipe and is not mains drinking water."

Prof Hannah Cloke, a natural hazards researcher at the University of Reading, said: "I would hope green keepers and grounds staff follow best advice about when to water, only watering areas that they need to. It does seem crazy to sprinkle drinking water over sports pitches that don't need it, when others are facing severe shortages."

'Private school fields stay lush and green while everywhere else parks go brown'

Cat Hobbs
We Own It

▼ Firefighters working to contain a big blaze near Saumos in south-west France yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: MAEL DUBIEZ/EPA



Record 'fire weather' mix of heat, pollution and wind causes devastation in the EU

Ajit Niranjan
Europe environment correspondent

Fire weather in the EU has broken records for severity for this time of year, data shows, as firefighters race to extinguish blazes across the Mediterranean.

Inflamed by carbon pollution, the hot, dry and windy weather across the EU since the start of the year has been 43% more severe than the end-of-July average over the last two decades, data from the European Forest Fire Information Service (Effis) shows.

Three firefighters died in Greece on Tuesday, officials said, while firefighters in France and Spain made progress tackling major blazes burning dangerously close to large cities.

The figures, which were published yesterday, showed that so far this year 435,000 hectares (1.1m acres) have burned in the EU, roughly triple the recent historical average. The devastation is the result of 1,400 fires, more than double the average.

In France, where a blaze in the dense pine forests near Bordeaux grew so big it generated a thunderstorm that could ignite more fires, a total of 91,000 hectares have burned, according to the Effis, breaking the country's record for a full year of fires with one month of summer still to go.

Regional authorities in Gironde said the fire remained under control

after a quiet night, with continuing work around its edge and in active hotspots. Temperatures were forecast to be "fairly favourable" after 38C heat and strong winds hampered firefighting efforts on Wednesday.

A further 84,000 people were allowed to return home yesterday after 60,000 people were given the green light on Tuesday.

In Spain, where its largest wildfire on record was burning west of Madrid, a total of 207,000 hectares have burned across the country, according to the Effis. The figure is nearly five times the average for this time of year but shy of the devastation reached during the 2022 fires.

Regional authorities in Madrid said the fire had been declared stable but residents of seven housing estates were unable to return home. The prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, announced the end of the national emergency in the regions of Ávila and Madrid yesterday morning. However, a new fire near the Portuguese border had prompted the evacuation of 600 people, officials said.

Wildfires in France and Spain have forced more than 300,000 people from their homes and tourist accommodation this month, prompting requests for EU support in the form of firefighters, fire engines, and water-dropping planes and helicopters.

Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, thanked firefighters for their "courage

Clooneys forced to flee Provence home

George and Amal Clooney have been forced to flee their French home as a wildfire burned nearby, his agent confirmed yesterday.

The Clooneys bought their hilltop estate, Domaine du Canadel, in Brignoles, in the Var, Provence, in 2021 and it has since become their primary residence.

In a letter to the mayor of Brignoles the actor said: "First, we hope you and the people of our city are safe and second, that Amal and I are determined to ensure ... we remain fully part of this community and [will] contribute to its rebuilding. We love Brignoles and the friends we have there."

Catherine Shoard

▼ The Clooneys' Canadel estate in Brignoles, south-eastern France, where the couple have pledged to help rebuild the community

PHOTOGRAPH: BEST IMAGE / BACKGRID



and commitment” on Wednesday as crews sent by Romania and Greece extended their stays.

Difficult weeks ahead are expected as fires worsen in Italy and Greece, officials at the EU’s crisis management centre had said on Wednesday morning. Later that day, the Greek fire department announced the deaths of two firefighters who were tackling a blaze on the island of Crete, and of another in the south of the mainland.

Greece has so far had a relatively calm fires season, Effis data up to 29 July shows, with slightly fewer fires than usual and a burned area well below the average.

Meanwhile, Italy and Portugal have seen near record-breaking numbers of fires, and burned areas well above average. The countries have so far been spared the scale of destruction experienced by France and Spain, but one firefighter died in Italy last week while tackling ferocious blazes in Sicily.

Climate breakdown is causing Europe to burn this summer, with a series of almost back-to-back heatwaves drying out vegetation and providing a vast fuel supply that has allowed small fires to grow into raging infernos.

Sánchez repeated calls to create a “national pact” to address the climate emergency during a visit to a command post on Wednesday.

“These fires may or may not be caused by humans, but in any case, they increase exponentially as a result of these high temperatures, low humidity, and also the atmospheric phenomena that these fires, these large fires, cause in our forests,” he said.

A study by an international team of scientists published yesterday in the journal *Scientific Reports* found that since the 1980s, southern Europe had experienced a steady decline in the number of fires and the area burned as authorities became better at preventing fires and suppressing them.

The study found the trend began to reverse in 2018.

It found that summer days conducive to strong wildfires had more than doubled since 1981 across large parts of Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Greece.

In parts of France and Spain, the summertime fire weather index over the past decade was up to 50% higher than the 1981-2010 average.

The scientists said this had resulted in European fires shifting to “fewer but more intense and larger events”, with fires that escaped initial attempts at suppression able to “quickly become catastrophic”.

Rapid analyses have found western Europe’s June heatwave would have been “virtually impossible” in a world without climate breakdown, while the level of soil dryness – a major factor in bigger blazes – was made five times more likely. The heatwaves are estimated to have killed at least 10,000 people and cost grain farmers €2bn (£1.7bn) in lost crops.

The increase in temperatures from fossil fuel pollution has come as rural regions in southern Europe have hollowed out, with farms being abandoned as populations age and young people move to cities. The resultant overgrowth in vegetation has troubled firefighters and wildfire researchers across the Mediterranean.



‘Extremely scary findings’ Global heating made blazes far more likely, study reveals

Damian Carrington
Environment editor

The extreme heat and drought stoking the huge wildfires in Spain and France were made far more likely by the climate crisis, scientific analysis has found.

The hot, dry and windy weather was made at least 20 times more likely by global heating in Spain and twice as likely in France, experts from the World Weather Attribution consortium have calculated.

The finding is the latest to pin the blame for western Europe’s sweltering and deadly summer firmly on the global heating caused by the burning of oil, gas and coal.

The intense heatwave at the end of June, which is estimated to have killed 20,000 people, could not have happened without the extra heat trapped by carbon pollution, a previous WWA study showed. Another found that the climate-crisis-driven

▲ A scene of devastation yesterday after a wildfire raged through Villa del Prado, south-west of Madrid
PHOTOGRAPH: MANU FERNANDEZ/AP

heat was “sucking soils dry” as extreme drought spread across the continent.

The searing heat and parched land led to very high “daily severity ratings”. The DSR metric, used in the new analysis, measures how severe a wildfire will be if ignited.

Studies of the 2025 wildfires also found they were supercharged by the climate crisis.

This year’s fires in western Europe have been made worse by a wet winter and spring, which boosted the growth of vegetation that then dried out and provided fuel for the fires – so-called whiplash conditions.

Global heating is making winters wetter and summers drier and hotter in Europe.

Dr Clair Barnes of Imperial College London, who is part of the WWA study team, said: “We’ve seen repeatedly how climate change increases hot, dry, flammable conditions that are extremely conducive to wildfires.

“What’s unique about [the July fires in Spain and France] is that it’s still early in the season – and with another heatwave looming, these findings are extremely scary.

“What we’re seeing in is a clear sign of the escalating impacts of [human-caused] warming.”

Julie Arrighi, of the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, said: “What we are seeing now in Spain and France goes well beyond what we would expect from past events.”

The wildfires have released huge plumes of toxic smoke. Augustin Colette, of the French National Institute for Industrial Environment and Risks, said: “The smoke increased particulate [pollution] peak levels up to 20 times above what is considered ‘fair air quality’, and extremely poor air quality was felt up to 400km [250 miles] away from the fires.”

About 1.5 million people a year are estimated to have their lives shortened by wildfire smoke.

The WWA analysis assessed the seven-day period with the highest DSR for each country. The scientists used weather records and established statistical methods to estimate how much more likely a week of extremely high DSR was in today’s heated world, compared with the world before mass burning of fossil fuel raised the global temperature by 1.4C.

Major wildfires have also broken out in Britain and Greece, where three firefighters lost their lives.

Silence on climate crisis French politicians focus on the short-term issues

Angelique Chrisafis

As dozens of wildfires burned across France this week amid the summer’s fourth brutal heatwave, some wondered whether voters’ first-hand experience of the climate emergency would change the political debate before next year’s presidential election.

The Green leader, Marine Tondelier – who cut short a tour of France after being advised that at seven months pregnant she should avoid breathing smoke-filled air near a huge wildfire in Gironde – said the political class still had its “head in the sand”. She said the government had ignored her plea for cross-party crisis talks to declare “a national state of emergency on the climate” this summer. She called for a new “climate welfare state” in France to help those affected after fires led to about 260,000 people being evacuated across the country.

But politicians focused instead this week on arguments over budgets, crisis-planning and criticisms over the levels of state funding for emergency services and equipment to fight fires, including water-bombing planes. The more complex longer-term issues of cutting emissions and structural societal changes to address climate heating were largely left aside.

President Emmanuel Macron said it was not the time to analyse lessons learned while France was still in “full battle” against fires.

Macron, whose term as president ends next spring, returned to his war vocabulary of the 2020 Covid pandemic. As the Gironde fire burned an area four times the size of Paris, Macron flew to the crisis operations centre in Bordeaux, saying France was facing its “hardest situation since the second world war”. He also said the situation was “totally atypical”. Climate experts, in contrast, said growing numbers of forest fires amid rising temperatures had been predictable and would become increasingly common.

Before the presidential election, most parties will not clarify their full manifestos – and positions on the climate crisis – until this winter, and some climate campaigners worry that by then the fires and heatwaves may be less present in the media and in people’s minds.

Marine Le Pen, who leads the far-right anti-immigration National Rally party (RN) is seen as having a good chance of reaching the final round vote in the presidential race. During the second round of the last presidential race in 2022, Le Pen said: “I have never been a climate sceptic”. But the following year, she said the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was “alarmist”, and some RN politicians have questioned the role of human activity in global heating.

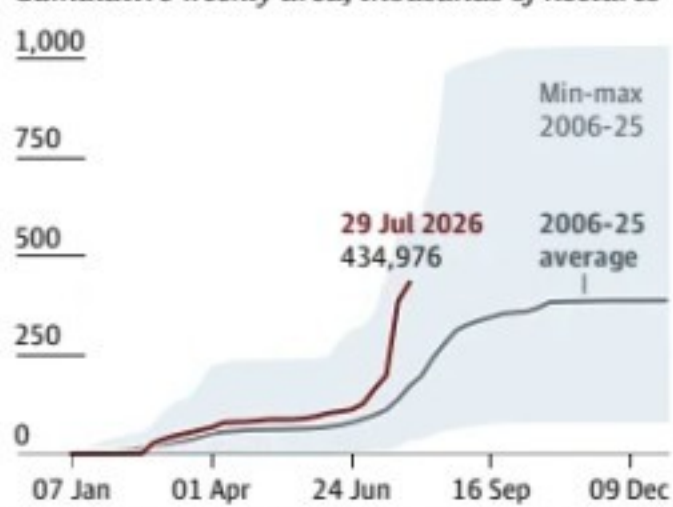
The RN has also opposed the workings of the EU’s green deal, designed to make the EU carbon neutral by 2050. But since the early summer heatwaves, key figures in Le Pen’s party have sought to stress that the RN are not climate crisis deniers. This week, the RN focused more on the heroism of firefighters and alleged underfunding of fire services by the state than long-term environmental action.

Earlier in July the radical left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon proposed reorganising French regions into “eco-regions” to ensure water supply and deal with the climate crisis.

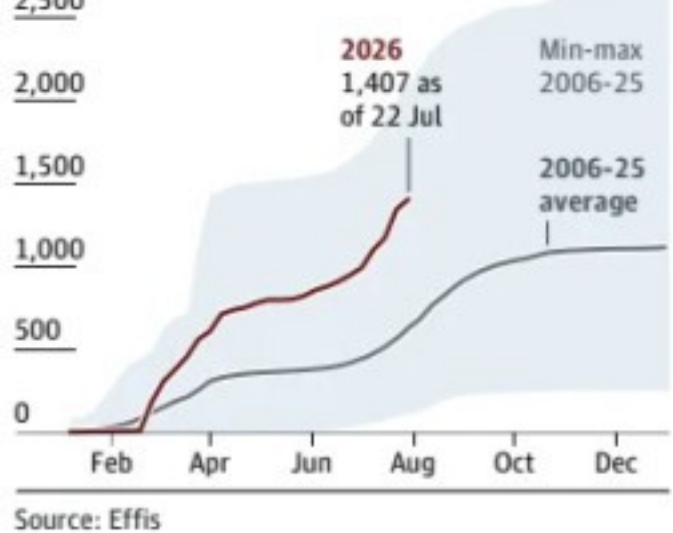
Rémi Lefebvre, a professor of political science at the University of Lille, said of the fires’ impact on the presidential campaign: “Ecology will probably be talked about more during the election campaign, but I’m not convinced that it will reconfigure French political life.” He said serious wildfires in previous years had not forced a change of direction and French politics had shown itself to be “too short-termist” to dig deep into changing models of society.

Lefebvre said Le Pen did not take a stance of denying climate change “because that is no longer possible ... we’ve passed that point”. But he said the broader issue was political “inaction” on climate challenges. He said many French people felt those in charge were powerless to act.

The area burned by wildfires in the EU
Cumulative weekly area, thousands of hectares



Weekly number of fires across the EU



◀ Aftermath of a wildfire in Lanton, Gironde, yesterday. Temperatures cooled near Bordeaux, raising hopes of an end to the area’s coastal pine forest fire
PHOTOGRAPH: OLIVIER MORIN/AFP/GETTY

Engineer died after Heathrow fuel tank explosion, inquest told

PA Media

A Virgin Atlantic engineer died of a traumatic brain injury after an explosion as he worked inside a plane fuel tank, an inquest heard.

The aircraft technician Georgie

Buxton, 23, was injured during the incident at Heathrow on 11 June. He died in hospital on 7 July.

Senior coroner Lydia Brown opened and suspended an inquest into his death at West London coroners court yesterday, as she is waiting to see if criminal charges are brought. A criminal investigation has been

launched by the Metropolitan police, who are working with the Health and Safety Executive.

Buxton was one of two technicians who were examining a fuel leak on a Boeing 787 900 on 11 June. A spokesperson for Aviation Policing told the court: "Both technicians wore breathing apparatus to protect them from any residual fuel fumes whilst inside the fuel tank."

The spokesperson said there was "a non-combustion explosion" while Buxton was inside the fuel tank.

He added: "Georgie Buxton took

the impact of that explosion to his head and torso, causing him to lose consciousness and suffer catastrophic injury."

His colleague, who was in another part of the fuel tank and avoided injury, managed to move Buxton from the tank.

The London Ambulance Service, plus Aviation Policing officers and Helicopter Emergency Medical Service attended the scene.

Buxton was transferred to hospital where he had several surgeries but "succumbed to his injuries".

A forensic post-mortem examination, carried out at the request of the police, found Buxton had suffered a traumatic brain injury.

Buxton was an aircraft technician for Virgin Atlantic based at Heathrow, having previously worked in the same role for Ryanair, the court heard. The Aviation Policing spokesperson described the criminal investigation as being at "a very early stage" and looking into "very serious and complex matters".

Brown said she had no details of any potential charges.

Top doctors decry end of NHS scheme for foreign medics

Denis Campbell
Health policy editor

The NHS has scrapped a longstanding scheme that let foreign doctors develop their skills through placements in UK hospitals and was seen as an example of British global "soft power".

Senior doctors have criticised NHS England's decision to axe the Medical Training Initiative, under which 400 to 500 foreign-trained doctors come to work in Britain each year.

Known in the NHS as "earn, learn and return", the MTI enabled medical graduates from low- and middle-income countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal to spend up to two years in the health service developing their skills, making them better doctors when they returned home.

Britain's medical royal colleges, which represent doctors, are aghast at the unexpected and "abrupt" axing of a programme they say helped not only the medics but also the NHS and their home countries.

It cost NHS England only £176,000 and has given thousands of foreign doctors a chance to work in Britain since it was set up in 2011.

Some fear it will exacerbate the already acute shortage of doctors across an NHS that relies heavily on international graduates, who comprise two-fifths of all its medics.

A spokesperson for the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, the umbrella group for all the medical colleges, said: "While we respect NHS England's decisions, we are obviously very disappointed."

"We believe the MTI has been a successful example of international medical collaboration, supporting both the NHS workforce and healthcare development overseas ... We think it's also made a vital

contribution to the UK's international reputation on the world stage and represents a prime example of British soft power."

The academy administers the scheme, sponsors the doctors who come to Britain for up to two years and helps arrange their temporary visas.

Doctors already in Britain through the MTI will be able to finish their placements, while those who applied for the next round by March will still be given places. The scheme will then be wound up.

An unpublished internal review by NHS England concluded the MTI "wasn't meeting its intended purpose" because some foreign doctors were staying in Britain, meaning health services in their countries of origin were not benefiting.

The review also found evidence of "wage exploitation", with foreign doctors being paid less than their UK peers despite doing the same type of work.

However, senior doctors believe NHS England decided to axe the MTI this year to help the government resolve its long-running dispute with resident doctors in England, who have been striking over pay and jobs since 2023.

They privately suspect it was done to appease the British Medical Association, which at the time was arguing for UK medical graduates to be given priority in the allocation of places on training schemes in surgery, A&E care and other specialties, amid a severe shortage of such posts.

An NHS England spokesperson said: "This taxpayer-funded initiative was closed after an independent review found it was not meeting its purpose to improve the quality of healthcare overseas."

"While action is also being taken to prioritise the needs of UK-trained medical graduates, the closure of this scheme was unrelated."

Dr Clare McNaught, the president of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, said the end of the MTI as UK medical graduates were being prioritised in medical training was "concerning [because] international medical graduates make up more than 40% of the UK's medical workforce and the NHS relies heavily on their expertise to deliver day-to-day services".

Prof Mark Strachan, the president of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, said he was "disappointed" at the axing of the MTI, which his college was proud to have been part of. He said: "It offered real benefits to the international medical graduates taking part - who would then take their learning and new skills back to their home countries - and to health services in the UK."

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500

The number of foreign-trained doctors who came to work in Britain each year through the NHS scheme

New border rules left couple stuck in Poland after living in UK for 80 years

Lisa O'Carroll
Senior correspondent

A couple who came to the UK from Poland as child refugees after the second world war have told of their terrifying experience after being told they did not have post-Brexit rights to return to the UK.

Maria Krupa, 85, and her husband, Czeslaw, 92, had been living as Polish citizens in the UK for nearly 80 years when they travelled to Poland to meet family members in May.

However, they were not allowed to board their Ryanair flight home on the grounds that they neither had proof of the right to live in the UK nor the new Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) now required for foreign tourists entering the UK.

"It was a big shock," said Maria Krupa. "We were very, very disappointed and a bit upset because my husband takes a lot of medicine because of a stroke to his spinal cord."

The Krupas, who met in the UK and later married and settled in Bury, Greater Manchester, were originally issued with "aliens' registration cards" and have travelled extensively as adults without anyone asking for their immigration status.

Czeslaw, who came from Lviv which was then part of Poland, and Maria, who left her home city in what is now Belarus as an infant, arrived in Southampton in 1947 and 1948 respectively as the dependants of displaced Polish service members who had been evacuated in 1940.

Their fathers had been part of Gen Władysław Anders' Polish army, which served with the allies in Persia,

India, the Middle East and Africa and played a key role in Germany's defeat.

"We tried to explain to Ryanair that our fathers fought for Poland and England in the war, but they refused to let us on the plane because they said they would have to pay a big fine," said Maria. "My husband was really upset," she said, explaining that he was in a mobility scooter. He has difficulty getting in and out of cars and "just wanted to get home".

The couple are now speaking out to help others in the same position. "It was a big, big shock because we never heard of this and we never thought for one minute that after nearly 80 years someone would tell us we couldn't go home," said Maria. Kate Smart, chief executive of Settled, who helped the Krupas, said her team saw "thousands of cases" like theirs. "It is a really common occurrence, almost on a daily basis."

The EU settlement scheme was launched in 2019 to give EU citizens living in the UK the documentary evidence needed to travel in and out of the country as they did under the pre-Brexit free movement rules.

Many of those seen by Settled are elderly, with British children and grandchildren. "They have nobody in their family circle who thinks like immigrants so they don't talk about things like settled status," said Smart.

Maria Krupa said she had never thought to get a British passport. "I love England. I always say, I'm very grateful to England, you know, to have taken so many people, thousands after the war. But I just thought it was important that we stay Polish," she said.

After being forced to leave the



▲ Maria and Czeslaw Krupa in Bury, where they live



◀ Czeslaw (far left) with his brother and a cousin in Africa in 1944; left, Maria in Karachi, where her father was stationed, in 1943



'We tried to explain to Ryanair that our fathers fought for Poland and England, in the war'

Maria Krupa

airport late one night in May, they returned the next day with an ETA but had to cheat the system by posing as tourists claiming they lived at a Polish home as the online form would not accept their British address.

"When we arrived in England we were terrified, we had to be careful about what we said," she said. "We were terrified because they started asking questions and we thought we are not going to lie again and have to tell the truth."

After going to Citizens Advice they were connected with Settled. Smart commended the Home Office resolution centre for its swift action after the charity submitted a no-time-limit application that resulted in settled status for the Krupas last week. She appealed to the government to take note, arguing that "a process should have kicked in at the airport" when the issue such as this arose.

The Home Office has been approached for comment.

Man, 55, jailed for destroying family home in row over will

PA Media

A man who destroyed his childhood home in a fire in the mistaken belief that he had been cut out of his inheritance of the property has been jailed for four years.

Darren Davies, 55, set fire to the £260,000 four-bedroom detached bungalow where he lived with his brother, Craig, in Hambleton, Lancashire, following the death of their parents just months apart in 2024.

Neighbours were disturbed by a loud bang on the morning of 27 March and the property erupted into flames, Preston crown court heard.

Davies emerged from the house "miraculously uninjured" and told a passer-by: "My family want the house. If I can't have it, no one can."

Prosecutor Michael O'Brien said firefighters had brought the blaze under control before it could spread to other properties. The court was told gas cylinders had been placed in the kitchen, living room and one of the front bedrooms. Petrol was found in the loft and a candle had been lit.

Davies was jailed for four years and four months after he pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing to arson being reckless as to whether life was endangered. In a victim personal statement, Craig Davies told the court that his parents had made wills that gave

an equal share of the bungalow to himself and his brother. He said he told the defendant last year that he wanted to sell the property and "go our separate ways" but said it "would not happen straight away".

He said: "In early 2025, Darren developed the bizarre idea that there was a secret will signed by my dad in the last few months of his life leaving the house solely to myself. This was a notion entirely of his making. He continually accused me of being part of a plot against him."

Craig Davies, who was not in court, said: "The only thing that remained in fact was the extension that my dad had put in. That would have put a wry smile on his face. Everything I owned in the house was incinerated. Darren has effectively erased everything that defined my life before 27 March."

He applied to the court for compensation from his brother for a sum of more than £170,000, including the half-share of the bungalow

and £20,000 for the loss of his extensive CD collection.

The defendant was said to have a "long history" of mental health difficulties including diagnoses of bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety and autism spectrum disorder. A



◀ Darren Davies set fire to his childhood home, above, wrongly believing it had been left solely to his brother

psychiatric report from the defence concluded he was mentally unwell at the time of setting the fire when he was overcome by an "autism crisis".

In a letter to the judge Darren Davies apologised to his brother and family, to the neighbours he "put at risk" and the village of Hambleton.

Neil Ronan, defending, said: "It is merciful and lucky that I make this submission without anyone having been hurt - including him, as it was his plan to end his life. For over a decade he was the primary carer for his ailing parents. He did regrettably become more alienated and spent more time in his room."

Judge Parry told Davies it was "a sad and serious case", but he took into account his guilty plea at the earliest opportunity and that his responsibility was "substantially reduced by your mental disorder". Davies must serve a maximum of half his sentence in custody, with the remainder on licence.

Saudi Arabia plans offensive against Houthis in Yemen to allow passage for oil exports

Patrick Wintour
William Christou

Saudi Arabia is preparing for a military offensive against the Houthis by sea and possibly by land in central Yemen, Yemeni sources believe, in a move to break the chokehold on its oil exports through the southern Red Sea.

Saudi forces have been seen withdrawing from the east of Yemen in what could be the groundwork for a land offensive. At the same time, Riyadh is trying to organise a naval coalition to protect shipping from Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab strait.

The Saudi defence ministry yesterday said 14 states including Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan and Djibouti had issued a joint statement supporting a maritime defence coalition.

The Iran-aligned Houthis, who control the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, and much of its Red Sea coastline, announced on 20 July that they were implementing a blockade against Saudi ships, but have denied they are planning to impose tolls on all ships.

The group says it will lift the blockade once Saudi Arabia lifts its blockade on Yemen, positioning the dispute with Saudi Arabia over the future of Yemen and not directly about Iran. Saudi Arabia intervened in the Yemeni civil war in 2015 in support of the country's UN-recognised

government against the Houthi rebels. Riyadh has also asked the US and a group of European countries, including Germany, France, the UK and Italy, to join a Red Sea coalition.

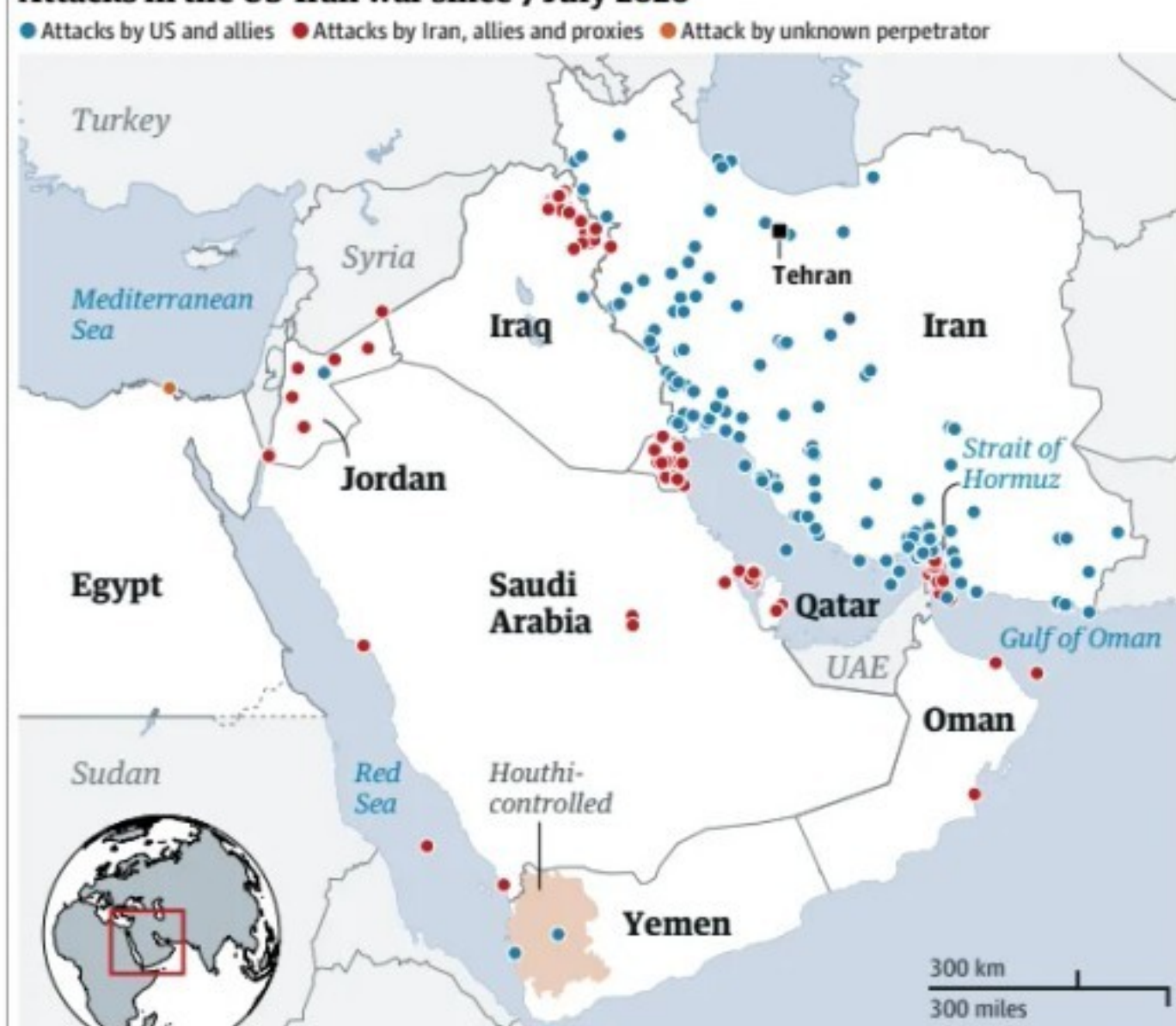
The EU already has a naval protection mission, Aspides, operating in the Red Sea and it remains unclear if the Houthis are mounting a general blockade or one directed solely at Saudi Arabia.

Houthi forces said on 25 July they had also hit "sensitive" oil transport sites inside Saudi Arabia linking eastern province oilfields to a Red Sea export hub. If the Red Sea route is closed to Saudi shipping in addition to the strait of Hormuz blockade on the other side of the Arabian



▲ An image that the US says shows smoke rising after a strike on Iran

Attacks in the US-Iran war since 7 July 2026



Source: Aclad, Guardian research. Note: data as of 30 July 2026. Attacks include reported interceptions

peninsula, the kingdom's oil export will be severely constrained.

Up to 80% of Saudi crude exports were shipped through the strait of Hormuz before the Iran war began. The Red Sea has therefore grown in importance, with over half of Saudi oil now transported overland to loading terminals at the port city of Yanbu.

Saudi strikes in Iraq on Wednesday, meanwhile, killed at least 20 when it hit back at the Iraqi militia for striking its oil facilities. The US president, Donald Trump, said the joint US-Saudi attacks had been mounted with the agreement of the Iraqi government, a claim that Baghdad did not confirm.

The Saudi defence minister, Prince Khalid bin Salman, held an urgent meeting with Trump and JD Vance on Wednesday to discuss the next steps. The Saudis are keen to show they will defend themselves and their industry, but are not willing to escalate the war against Iran, arguing the disagreements between the US and Iran can still be settled by diplomacy.

The low-intensity, tit-for-tat war between the US and Iran reignited as the US carried out strikes on Iran and Tehran retaliated at US allies in the region.

The US's strikes overnight on Wednesday – the first in more than five days – came hours after Trump vowed to hit Iran "very hard" following Tehran's targeting of a base in Jordan that hosts American troops.

US Central Command yesterday said it had hit dozens of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps targets in Iran as part of a "heavy wave of strikes", including military command centres and missile and drone facilities.

"The strikes aimed to further diminish threats posed by Iran and its proxies to American forces, commercial shipping and neighbouring Gulf countries," it said.

Mediators insisted talks were continuing despite the renewed hostilities, with the Pakistani foreign ministry spokesperson, Tahir Andrabi, saying they were doing their "utmost to bring all parties back" to the negotiating table.

Elsewhere, drone strikes led to fires on two natural gas vessels at the Egyptian port of Damietta, according to the British maritime security firm Ambrey. The Egyptian government confirmed a drone attack had ignited the blaze, but it was not immediately clear who was responsible for the strikes on a US-owned floating storage facility and a Greek-owned tanker. No injuries were reported and the port remained operational.

It was the first time Egypt has been attacked since the Iran war started and signalled a potential widening of the conflict. The Houthi rebels said they were not responsible.

The troop movements inside Yemen involve concentrating forces for what could be an attack on al-Bayda, a governorate in central southern Yemen captured by the Houthis in 2020-21, the sources said.

Fighting between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia has erupted in the past fortnight with the Houthis mounting attacks against Saudi Aramco facilities. The strikes inside Saudi Arabia came hours after Saudi airstrikes targeted Houthi-controlled sites in the port of Hodeidah and a third Saudi commercial vessel was attacked in the Red Sea.



A crisis within Iran riven by internal dissent and fears of a forever war

Patrick Wintour
Diplomatic editor



Iran, in the midst of an escalating five-month war with the US, continues to stumble from one internal crisis to another – whether it is over public executions, the rising cost of living or the alleged bias of the state broadcaster. But there is now a growing threat of a long diplomatic deadlock as the war broadens, forged by mutual distrust in which neither side believes the other will stick to any agreement.

Parts of the Trump administration and the Iranian opposition – including Reza Pahlavi, the son of the former deposed Shah – have never abandoned the belief that the Iranian government is on the brink of collapse.

Meanwhile, Masoud Pezeshkian, Iran's president, rarely tires of warning that the conditions that led to the bloody protests in January remain. At a recent meeting of the supreme judicial council, he argued: "Iran is engaged in a full-scale war. Today's war is not just a war of missiles; the enemy has come to the conclusion that it cannot force the Iranian nation to surrender



through military attacks. The most important battlefield today is the economy and livelihood of the people. If economic pressures cause social discontent to form and this discontent spreads, the enormous social capital that the people have created in support of the system will be lost."

Undoubtedly dissent, in the form of despair, exists. Golshan Fathi, a Tehran human rights activist, recently wrote on her social media page: "Caught between natural disasters, management failures and man-made crises ... every day we don't live, we just practice enduring."

Dissent in the form of political protest also exists, whether it is those inside jails or citizens in the squares of Isfahan protesting against the current wave of intimidatory public executions. Many critics ask why the punishment of the accused takes place on public gallows, yet their trials are held in secret courts.

This week, the political bureau of the Nation's Union party warned that ignoring protests over the wave of executions could have "devastating consequences", and urged academics and religious

scholars to intervene to end this state violence.

Azar Mansouri, once a close reformist ally of Pezeshkian, warned last week at the annual meeting of the Iranian reformist front about a small but vocal group that seemed determined to portray negotiated agreements with the US as retreats or defeat. War, she warned, "is not just a confrontation between military forces and armies. It is the destruction of the

▲ An anti-Trump banner next to an Iranian missile system in Tehran yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH: MAJID ASGARIPOUR/REUTERS

▼ Rescuers search for victims after a strike on Qeshm; above right, an anti-government protest in January

PHOTOGRAPHS: IRIB/REUTERS; AP



economy, the erosion of social capital, the spread of despair, the emigration of elites, the increase in poverty and the loss of opportunities for development. Ultimately, it threatens the future of the nation."

Similarly a "we do not want war" statement signed by 268 political activists this month said they believed the overwhelming majority of the population opposed the war, and this should be tested in a public vote. Another letter from 1,000 activists linked with the former president Mohammad Khatami warned "the contemporary experience of Iran is that war has no winners. Those who advocate negotiations should not be slandered."

What unites these initiatives is a fear that diplomats are losing, and Iran is being edged into a forever war that can be portrayed as an Iranian-Arab war, a war that would be to Israel's advantage.

Yet opposition to the principle of negotiation with America - fuelled by Donald Trump's erratic behaviour - is being voiced by hardliners, in street rallies and more recently on unofficial billboards. Despite being a conservative newspaper, Jomhuri-e Eslami complained that "an addiction to violating the dignity of one's political opponents is increasing every day". That is, in part, a reference to the criticism of negotiators from the publicly funded national broadcaster IRIB, long seen as a preserve of those opposed to talks with the west.

Many see IRIB as an exclusive platform for the hardliners rather than a mirror of a diverse society. There are calls for a complete overhaul of the organisation's accountability when a new head is appointed in September. At one level the politics of the national broadcaster should not matter, since surveys suggest less than 12% of the country watches it. The difficulty for the government is that this leaves audiences watching hostile foreign satellite channels instead.

Tension over the national broadcaster coincides with a period of unprecedented economic pressure. In the next six months food rationing could become necessary, Majid-Reza Hariri, the head of the Iran-China chamber of commerce, warned this week. Gholamhossein Mohammadi, the

deputy minister of labour, said more than a million jobs had been lost as a result of the war.

In a way, rationing - through food price inflation - has already started as Iranians are being forced to change their diets owing to the cost of fruit, eggs and chicken. Year-on-year food inflation reached 134% this month, meaning the average household's monthly food budget has more than doubled in a year. Overall inflation is at 84%. In a further sign of the long-term pressure on living standards, figures released this week showed the real value of the minimum wage had plummeted.

The toll of the war on the economy has spread everywhere from the internet to tourism. All 400 hotels on Kish Island in the strait of Hormuz - the site of US bombing yesterday - have shut. As many as 30,000 Iranians visited medical centres during the two wars in 2025 and 2026.

Civilian facilities have been almost destroyed and the Bushehr airport has become unusable. Yet one of the biggest bombshells was detonated on national television when Zabihullah Khodayian, the head of the General Inspection Organisation, a national audit office, revealed the scale of foreign-exchange corruption among so-called trusts, highly secretive government-sponsored bodies.

These trusts, embedded in the Iranian political system for years, are entities set up to transfer Iranian oil income outside the network of US sanctions. It is self-evident that they act in an untransparent way, and siphon off public money.

Khodayian confirmed as much, saying one trust was given \$200m (£149m), had not returned the money, and had also left the country. He said a further 229 individuals owed the state a total of €23.5bn (£20.2bn), while the judiciary said cases were being opened against nearly 50 individuals.

It is still unclear on what basis these trusts were selected and how they are held accountable. But there is a growing chance that a major scandal is about to be revealed that could involve Iran's elite. If so, all the talk of social cohesion across the classes will start to look very hollow.

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UK's only female chess team told to add a man as they reach top tier

Geraldine McKelvie

Britain's only all female chess team has been promoted to the game's top tier - only to be told it will have to add men to its squad.

She Plays to Win Lionesses A Team have fallen foul of a rule designed to boost female participation in the sport. The Four Nations Chess League (4NCL) requires all of its first division teams to have at least one player of each sex on its roster.

This means She Plays to Win face dropping one of its eight top-level female players to make way for a man.

The players say this will destroy the team's camaraderie and discourage female participation in the game.

Women are underrepresented at all levels in chess, with only about 11% of top-rated players being female.

Lorin D'Costa, who founded She Plays to Win on Zoom during the Covid pandemic, said: "The Lionesses earned promotion the hard way, but now their reward is losing the thing that makes them special."

"Not enough girls are playing chess at a young age, and this matters because chess teaches unique strategic skills for life. Learning these skills can help more girls go on to thrive in the type of strategic roles that end up defining the world of tomorrow - roles that for too long have been dominated by men."

"It takes work to create an environment and sense of community where girls and young women feel that they belong in chess, like our teams in the national league."

While competing in 4NCL's second division, the team was allowed to field only women as long as it included one player under the age of 18. Some, like Alisha Vyas, 19, joined the team after playing in mixed squads, sometimes as the only woman.

"I knew I was only there to fulfil the quota as a woman, and there wasn't that sense of community," Vyas said. "Being part of She Plays to Win

is amazing - we have team dinners every time, and there's real camaraderie between the girls."

Emily Maton, 18, added that the team had been "promoted on [its] own merit" and shouldn't be compelled to include a male player.

"There's no shortage of male players in the division," she said. "The whole point of the team is to bring female representation when there isn't really any at all, and they introduced this rule because there weren't enough female players."

"The expectations for me were always a lot lower than they were for male players. I'd have coaches say things like, 'You're very good for a girl.'"

"We've had people tell us we don't deserve to be in this division, that we're not good enough. We got to the top proving everyone wrong - and now this undermines that."

Mike Truran, from 4NCL, said: "Since its inception in 1994, the top division has always been a mixed-team competition, each team requiring a mix of males and females."

"We remain the only league in the UK that we are aware of that encourages female participation in chess by requiring mixed teams."

"We surveyed all the team captains during the 2025/2026 season about whether the rule should be changed; there was no significant appetite on the part of the captains to do so. We remain open to changing the rule should captains' opinions change. There is no evidence that the rule as it stands discourages female participation in chess."

"Indeed, we believe that by requiring all teams in the top division to have at least one female player we actively encourage female participation in chess."

"We believe that changing the rule to one that has no mixed-team requirement at all, such that teams in the top division have are not required to include a female player, would serve to actively discourage female participation in chess."

► *The Lionesses A Team, who have qualified for the top division of the Four Nations Chess League, don't want to add a man*

PHOTOGRAPH: SHE PLAYS TO WIN



◀ Fumi Kaneko and Lukas B Brændsrød dance *After The Rain*, part of a repertoire chosen by the Royal Ballet principal dancer Marianela Nuñez, below

PHOTOGRAPHS: TRISTRAM KENTON/ THE GUARDIAN

She can reel off a fiendish string of fouettés, whipping her leg in circles, and then come to a gentle standstill

Dance review Perfect ballerina showcases technical brilliance

Marianela: Timeless
Royal Opera House, London
★★★★★

Lyndsey Winship

Is there such a thing as being too perfect? Marianela Nuñez is certainly one of the most perfect ballerinas around. At 44, she still has superlative technique and absolute command. She can reel off a fiendish string of fouettés (as in tonight's extract from *Le Corsaire*), whipping her leg in circles, and then come to a gentle standstill, the smoothest brakes you ever saw.

It is absolutely frictionless; it is beauty and capability and egoless

self-possession. And this may seem an unfair ask, but do we sometimes also need a little grit?

Timeless is Nuñez's first solo show. Not truly solo, but she's the star, it's her choice of repertoire, and she does everything "just right", paying tribute to the Royal Ballet, which she joined at 16, and



its choreographers: Frederick Ashton, Kenneth MacMillan, Christopher Wheeldon, Wayne McGregor.

She also offers an amazing showcase of the company's dancers and lets them shine. Matthew Ball and Mayara Magri dancing the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* is a highlight. Akane Takada and Calvin Richardson are tender in a duet from McGregor's *Infra*, and Fumi Kaneko and Lukas B Brændsrød dance Wheeldon's serene *After the Rain*.

For herself, Nuñez chooses first Jerome Robbins's *In the Night*, set to Chopin's *Nocturnes*. It's a very grownup piece for three couples. Nuñez dances with Ball, all super-smooth take-offs into jumps and lifts and tortuous indecision about their relationship. It's a gorgeous piece. Ashton's *Marguerite and Armand* is the opposite, quite the melodrama, not least Nuñez's TB-stricken courtesan.

George Balanchine's *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux* with the Royal's new principal Patricio Revé is a promising partnership for the future. You could ask for more, but you can't fault her.

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Overheating homes

Families moved out of glass-fronted block after row over air-con

Geneva Abdul

As the fourth heatwave of the year hit the UK on Wednesday, Benice Bodah and her three teenage sons braced for more scorching temperatures inside their south-west London home. The two-bedroom flat is equipped with a built-in air-conditioning unit, but it has been working only intermittently in the almost three years since the family were placed in temporary accommodation at Britannia Point in Colliers Wood. "It has not been easy, but what can we do?" said Bodah, 48.

Several councils have now agreed to stop housing families in emergency accommodation in the glass-fronted block after the Guardian revealed they were told they could not use the built-in air conditioning during heatwaves as it had "not been offered as an amenity" for them.

The 19-storey building is owned by Criterion Capital, set up by the billionaire property magnate Asif Aziz. The temporary tenancies can last from weeks to years and are managed separately by letting agencies, including London-based Aura Assets Management.

Wandsworth council, which has placed residents in the block, is making "immediate" plans to remove their tenants from the tower.

A Wandsworth council spokesperson said: "As ever, the welfare of residents is our priority and we are working at pace to ensure suitable alternative accommodation is available."

Sutton council said it had stopped placing people there,

and was "working closely with all remaining Sutton residents in the building to ensure they are able to move to other accommodation".

Croydon council said it faced very high demand for temporary accommodation, and was not removing people, but had raised concerns with Criterion and that council staff had been carrying out "welfare checks" with those in the block.

Stuart Neaverson, a Labour councillor in Merton who has been assisting residents, has called on other councils that have placed people in the building to follow suit. "Criterion Capital, who own the building and the air-conditioning units, need to explain how this could ever happen and why some residents are still going without while temperatures hit 35C," he said.

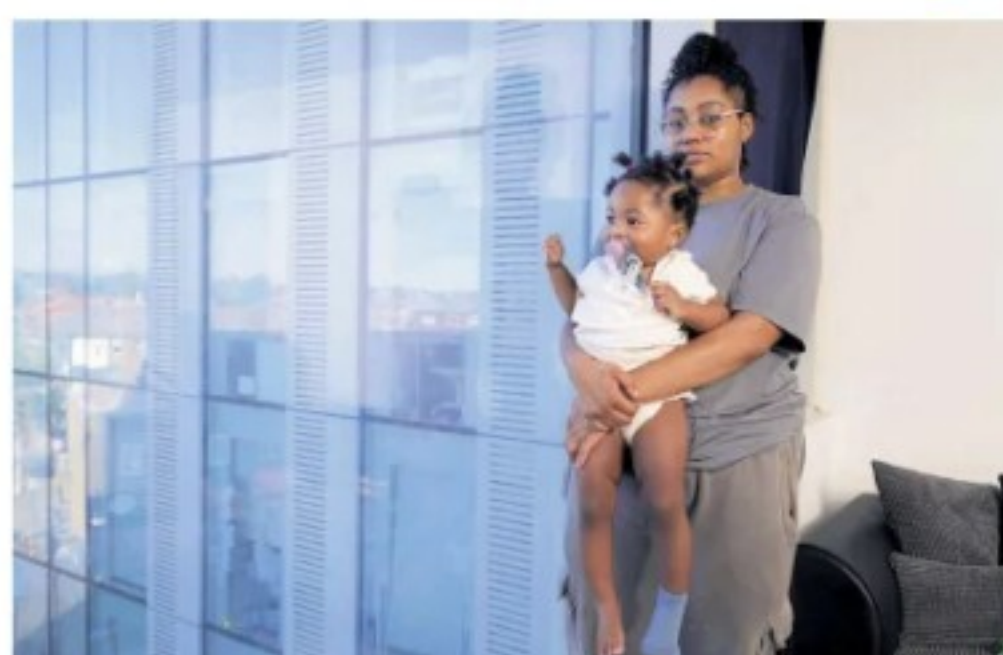
A Criterion spokesperson said: "As the freeholder, we engage with our leaseholders and encourage them to work with local authorities to support tenants in these unprecedented circumstances."

Aura Assets Management was approached for comment.

Since the Guardian reported that temporary accommodation households were prohibited from using built-in air conditioning, some have been receiving letters saying they could "feel free to use" it if it was working, at a cost of between £35 and £50 each month. However, some tenants are still without working units and others have said the additional charge is unaffordable.

By Wednesday evening, the unit in Bodah's flat was working, but she said she has no choice but to keep it switched off because she cannot afford the extra cost.

Several temporary residents with tenancies managed by Aura



▲ Benice Bodah and, left, Sabrina Walters with her one-year-old daughter, who live in the Britannia Point block in Colliers Wood, south-west London.

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRISTIAN SINIBALDI/ THE GUARDIAN

▶ Stuart Neaverson, a Labour councillor, says Britannia Point's owners need to explain why some residents are still going without air conditioning



told the Guardian on Wednesday that repeated complaints over inoperative air-conditioning units have been left unresolved, in some cases, for more than a year.

One tenant, Mahad Maalin, who is living with his 81-year-old mother, had given up on the air-conditioning unit after the issue was not resolved last summer. Like Bodah, he said he would not pay the cost of running it for the remaining month of summer, and instead has two fans and keeps the blinds drawn.

Another tenant, Sabrina Walters, raised concerns over her children's health as her one-year-old daughter was overheating and her 12-year-old suffered cluster nose bleeds, which can be caused by overheating.

"I'm not fussed about myself, but when it comes to my child's health, especially at that age: she's one year old, she didn't ask to be over-dehydrated," said Walters. "She's clammy, so you can tell it's her body fighting to keep cool. That really pissed me off."

The family escaped the heat of their flat by going outside, which they said was cooler, or would spend time in one room with multiple fans. The windows in their third-floor flat do not extend fully.

It was only after Walters raised the matter with her local MP that her air-conditioning unit was turned back on, after a two-week outage.

She said other residents, including a mother of two, had told her that their air-conditioning units remain broken. "I felt bad even saying mine is on to be honest," said the 31-year-old.

Before councils announced they had removed their tenants from the tower, Walters was relieved to soon be moving elsewhere. "I don't like having to feel like I have to argue to live somewhere," she said.

Earlier this year Criterion Capital was accused of trying to mass evict tenants in the weeks leading up to the banning of no-fault evictions, which it has denied.

Aura previously told the Guardian the air conditioning was now "fully operational" and when asked about the email sent to a resident saying tenants in temporary accommodation were not given access to air conditioning, said it was "issued by the building management" based on "information and operational arrangements in place at the time".

Man found guilty of terrorism over 2022 Rushdie stabbing

Maya Yang

A man was convicted in the US on Wednesday on federal terrorism charges over the 2022 stabbing of the author Salman Rushdie, who has faced a decades-old death threat over his novel *The Satanic Verses*.

A jury in a New York federal court found Hadi Matar guilty of all the charges against him, including

engaging in an act of transnational terrorism. Matar had declined to take the stand. His attorney Nathaniel Barone said earlier this week: "At this time, the defence rests."

Matar, 28, is already serving a 25-year New York state prison sentence for attempted murder over the attack on Rushdie.

The federal conviction carries a potential life sentence.

Prosecutors alleged Matar shared propaganda videos before the attack

and communicated with an Iran-based contact who claimed to know "where to find Rushdie". They also said Matar had asked whether the fatwa against Rushdie was still active.

Rushdie, who had been about to speak on writers' safety, was slashed 15 times in front of a stunned audience. He was gravely wounded and lost the sight in his right eye.

According to a federal indictment, Matar's motivation for trying to kill Rushdie stemmed from a 2006 speech by Hezbollah's then chief, Hassan Nasrallah. In the speech, Nasrallah had endorsed a decades-old fatwa - a religious edict - calling for Rushdie to be killed over *The Satanic Verses*. After Rushdie's stabbing,

Matar admitted to having read only "a couple pages" of the book, which Iranian religious leaders had denounced as blasphemous.

In April 2024, Rushdie, who was born in India and moved to Britain as



▲ Salman Rushdie speaking at the New Orleans book festival in March

a teenager, wrote a memoir about the attack, which he titled *Knife*.

"After I finished writing the memoir ... it's like a door in my head opened and the stories came back," Rushdie said at Tulane University's New Orleans book festival in March. "I'd been really worried that I wouldn't be able to write fiction any more ... because of trauma and the shocking impact of what happened."

He also said he was tired of being everyone's "free speech Barbie", adding: "I don't feel symbolic ... I feel actual. I feel like I'm a working writer trying to make his work."

Additional reporting
Associated Press

Palestine Action can take ban appeal to supreme court

Haroon Siddique

Legal affairs correspondent

The co-founder of Palestine Action has won permission to challenge the ban against the group at Britain's highest court.

The direct action group was proscribed as a terrorist organisation in July last year but its co-founder, Huda Ammori, has been fighting to have the ban overturned following a mass civil disobedience campaign.

In February, the high court ruled that the ban was disproportionate and unlawful but its decision was overturned by the court of appeal last month.

The supreme court said yesterday that Ammori could appeal against the court of appeal's decision and that the case would be heard in the final quarter of this year.

It means the fate of more than 3,500 people who have been arrested for alleged support of Palestine Action remains in limbo as their cases are on hold until the legality of proscription has been definitively resolved.

Ammori welcomed the supreme court's decision. "The proscription of Palestine Action has become a vehicle for a far broader crackdown on expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people," she said.

"This unprecedented attack on



free speech and the right to protest in this country is already having a chilling effect at a time when speaking out about Israel's crimes could not be more urgent."

She put in an appeal directly to the supreme court to hear the case after the court of appeal refused permission to appeal against its own decision.

The court of appeal review involved five judges, which is unusual as it normally utilises two or three to hear cases.

It included the country's two most



▲ Huda Ammori won the right for an appeal at the UK's highest court

senior judges: the lady chief justice, Sue Carr, and the master of the rolls, Geoffrey Vos.

The supreme court said it was arguable that the ban represented a disproportionate interference with articles 10 and 11 of the European convention on human rights, which protect the rights of freedom of speech and protest respectively.

Ammori has pledged to challenge the ban, which has been widely condemned by civil liberties groups, as well as UN experts and politicians from across the divide, at the European court of human rights if it is upheld by the British courts.

As the supreme court's decision was published dozens more people were arrested for allegedly supporting, being a member of, and/or encouraging others to join, Palestine Action.

In a demonstration outside Westminster magistrates court in central London, protesters took turns to stand up and declare their support for or membership of Palestine Action.

▲ Police carry away Palestine Action protesters who gathered outside Westminster magistrates court

PHOTOGRAPH: JORDAN PETTITT/PA MEDIA

Many of the mainly elderly protesters lay down after speaking and were carried away by officers. Among those arrested was an 87-year-old woman in a wheelchair.

Dick Scroop, 79, from Wolverhampton, was one of those who was there to be arrested. He said: "There's a genocide in which the British government is deeply implicated by its diplomatic efforts and the continuing supply of weapons to Israel and the attempt to suppress legitimate protests by the wielding of anti-terrorism laws is simply unacceptable. It's an assault on free speech."

A Metropolitan police spokesperson said: "Officers have arrested 77 people. The majority of arrests have been for expressing support for a proscribed organisation. Four people have been arrested for encouraging or assisting a criminal offence."

Regulator looks at police contact with woman before her death

PA Media

Scotland's police regulator has said it is examining the contact Police Scotland had with a woman before she was killed.

Vikki Soloman, 44, is believed to have been murdered by her former partner, 46-year-old Lee Greenan, on 20 July. Greenan was arrested and was found dead in his cell at HMP Edinburgh on Sunday.

The Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (Pirc) said yesterday that it is investigating police contact that took place prior to Solomon's death.

Raymond Brown, head of investigations at Pirc, said: "Our thoughts are with all of those who have been affected following the tragic death of 44-year-old Vikki Soloman in Edinburgh on 20 July. We are investigating the police contact that was made prior to this date and will report our findings to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service in due course."

Soloman was found with serious injuries by emergency services at her home in Edinburgh and was pronounced dead at the scene.

A family statement said: "Following the heartbreaking loss of Vikki Soloman, her family is deeply moved and overwhelmed by the wave of love and supportive messages which brings great comfort at this devastating time."



◀ Vikki Soloman is believed to have been murdered by her former partner, Lee Greenan, on 20 July

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Homes and businesses raided across UK in crackdown on car finance nuisance texts

Rupert Jones

Laptops, mobile phones and documents have been seized after officials carried out search warrants in a crackdown on claims firms plaguing people with spam text messages about the car finance mis-selling scandal.

On Wednesday the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) executed warrants at homes and businesses linked to five companies in London, Liverpool, Bolton, Burnley and Swansea.

More than 12m complaints about nuisance marketing text messages

have been submitted by the public since September 2025 as claims management companies (CMCs) and other firms attempt to grab a share of the billions of pounds in compensation to be paid out to motorists who were mis-sold car loans.

In March the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) announced a £7.5bn industry-wide compensation scheme for the millions of victims of the scandal. However, the regulator was later forced to partly suspend the scheme because of legal challenges.

The FCA had expected it would start paying out £829 on average this year to those affected by the scandal, in which drivers were overcharged

for loans as a result of commission payments between lenders and car dealers between 2007 and 2024. But a court ordered the regulator to suspend parts of the scheme until a hearing in December or in February next year.

Andy Curry, the head of investigations at the ICO, said: "People are fed up with being bombarded by unwanted calls, texts and emails about car finance claims, and we're taking action." He said the raids sent "a clear message to the claims management sector: comply with the law or expect to hear from us".

It is understood that items seized included electronic devices such as

laptops and mobile phones, plus a large number of documents.

The companies linked to the searches are subject to continuing investigations and are believed to be responsible for sending a combined 170m texts to members of the public between September 2025 and May.

The ICO is working with the FCA, the Advertising Standards Authority and the Solicitors Regulation Authority to tackle poor practices relating to motor finance claims by some CMCs, law firms and lead generation companies.

The searches represent an escalation of the crackdown on rogue CMCs and other businesses. As a result of

the FCA's work, more than 1,200 misleading adverts have been removed or amended since January 2024. Some firms face enforcement investigations, while others have had to reduce their "unreasonable" fees or allow consumers to walk away from contracts free of charge.

The ICO has the power to apply to the courts for a warrant to search premises as part of investigations under the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations, where evidence may be seized. This can include mobile phones, laptops and sim farms: collections of devices that house hundreds or thousands of mobile phone sim cards.

The FCA has said there is no need to use a CMC or law firm because people can complain for free using a template letter on its website. This week it launched a nationwide advertising campaign to direct people to the letter. It will run across TV, radio, print, billboards and social media until 6 September.



Stage review Bullfighting, paella and flamenco make Shakespeare farce a fiesta

Love's Labour's Lost

Shakespeare's Globe, London

★★★★☆

Mark Lawson

That Love's Labour's Lost is a little unloved by producers and scholars is due to this 16th-century comedy being an early example of Shakespeare's dramatic craft – an RSC online timeline lists it ninth in the 38 main attributed plays – and an unusually inconclusive ending: the typical act five marry-go-round is suddenly deferred for a year.

These problems mean even purists object less than usual to a solving directorial concept. Tom Littler, in alfresco stagings playing this summer in Guildford and Richmond, pairs the seemingly incomplete piece with Much Ado About Nothing (which some believe to be an otherwise lost Shakespeare

piece called Love's Labour's Won), unifying characters and plot lines.

Apart from also being outdoors, Indiana Lown-Collins's revival for Shakespeare's Globe is an equally but differently radical revision. Shakespeare has the Spanish kingdom of Navarre – where three men have signed up to an early detox scheme, renouncing sex and food for meditation – visited by a princess of France and her retinue, who threaten their pledges.

In this version, everyone is Spanish – a translation helped, in the summer of 26, by there being as many fans flapping in the audience as in a high-season Madrid street cafe. On stage, adieu becomes adios with some other English words translated – a repast is specified to be paella – and the action punctuated and inflected by sequences of flamenco.

The hunting of a deer here becomes a choreographed bullfight, with Pablo Egea as the tauran prey. Dance and movement routines – the romantic longing and inherent violence of flamenco

reasonably reflecting the play's themes – regularly stop the show. The programme bills Carmen Igarza as choreographer and Vanessa Guevara as pre-hispanic movement consultant; however this duet worked, they deserve to take a bow at the end of each performance.

Less happily, substantial rewriting introduces the figure of Queen Elizabeth I to the masque staged amid the climactic anti-romantic interactions, including jokes about her sex

life and vagina. Shakespeare's play is filled with bawdy that this production stands up: in the scene in which the would-be abstinent men are disguised as Muscovites, they sport golden penile codpieces and nipped shoulder pads.

However, had Shakespeare pricked his patron in the way this production adds, Love's Labour's Lost would have been his final play, the other 29 denied us. I would be concerned about students and tourists leaving the Globe admiring

▲ Actors dial up the Spanish theme along with the flamboyantly dressed supporting cast, left

PHOTOGRAPHS: TRISTRAM KENTON/THE GUARDIAN

Shakespeare's Elizabethan lese-majesty, and such is the power of Littler's double bill that Love's Labour's Lost played alone now feels even more half-hearted. But this production is, within its concept, generally a joy.

Among the multinational cast, the Swiss-British-Turkish-Italian Philip Arditti inflects his cocky reluctant-abstinent Berowne with libidinous dons from culture, and spars nicely with Bea Segura's sparky Rosaline. Another Spanish actor, Andro Crespo, is an authentic Don Adriano de Armado, while also beautifully leading Michael McMahon and Adrián Solá's setting of the final song, "When daisies pied and violets blue." Alongside those responsible for movement and music, casting director Becky Paris should also win applause.

Until 13 September



◀ Indiana Lown-Collins's production draws in the Globe audience through comedic repartee and high-energy sequences

Eyewitness



▼ **Commonwealth Games, Glasgow**
England on their way to winning gold
in the men's 4000m team pursuit at
the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome

PHOTOGRAPH: TOM JENKINS/THE GUARDIAN



Solar installations surge as more households cut bills with rooftop panels

Jillian Ambrose

Great Britain has recorded more new solar power installations in the first half of this year than in any six-month period since 2011, as more households turn to rooftop panels to help cut their energy bills.

An analysis of the government's official figures shows that Great Britain added 142,536 solar installations in the first six months of the year, putting the country on track to top last year's record solar additions.

The government data, which includes large, ground-mounted solar farms and rooftop panels, revealed the half-year solar boom was second only to the record 167,316 installations in the second half of 2011, when the first large-scale solar farm was built in Cornwall.

Most of the new solar installations recorded in the government's official figures were on household rooftops,

though these smaller systems make up slightly less than a third of the country's total solar power capacity.

More households have fitted solar panels to their rooftops in recent years to cut their energy bills by generating their own electricity as fossil fuels have caused bills to rocket, according to energy companies.

The government's data also showed more households had taken up grants to replace their gas boilers with low-carbon alternatives. The total number of applications for the boiler upgrade scheme reached 4,512 last month, up by 21% compared with June last year.

Heat pumps are expected to be in higher demand in the months ahead after the government raised its grant funding by 20% last week, from £7,500 to £9,000, to help cover the costs of replacing fossil fuel heating.

The new prime minister, Andy Burnham, has also cut VAT on electricity bills from October, which makes running a heat pump cheaper.



▲ Rooftop solar panels on new homes in Leeds. There are now more than 2m solar installations across Great Britain PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY

142,536

Number of solar installations in Great Britain in the first half of the year, according to official figures

151%

Increase in the number of E.ON Next energy customers who have installed solar panels this year

The household supplier E.ON Next, which is poised to become the UK's biggest energy retailer, said it had recorded a 151% surge in the number of homes installing solar panels in the first half of 2026 compared with the same period last year.

"More and more households are realising just how much they can save by generating and storing their own energy," said Phil Gilbert, a director at E.ON Next. Some E.ON Next customers had saved up to £600 a year

on their energy bill after they signed on to the supplier's solar and battery tariff, he said.

"People want to engage with their energy use, take control of their bills and rely less on the grid, and solar gives them a practical way to do that," Gilbert added.

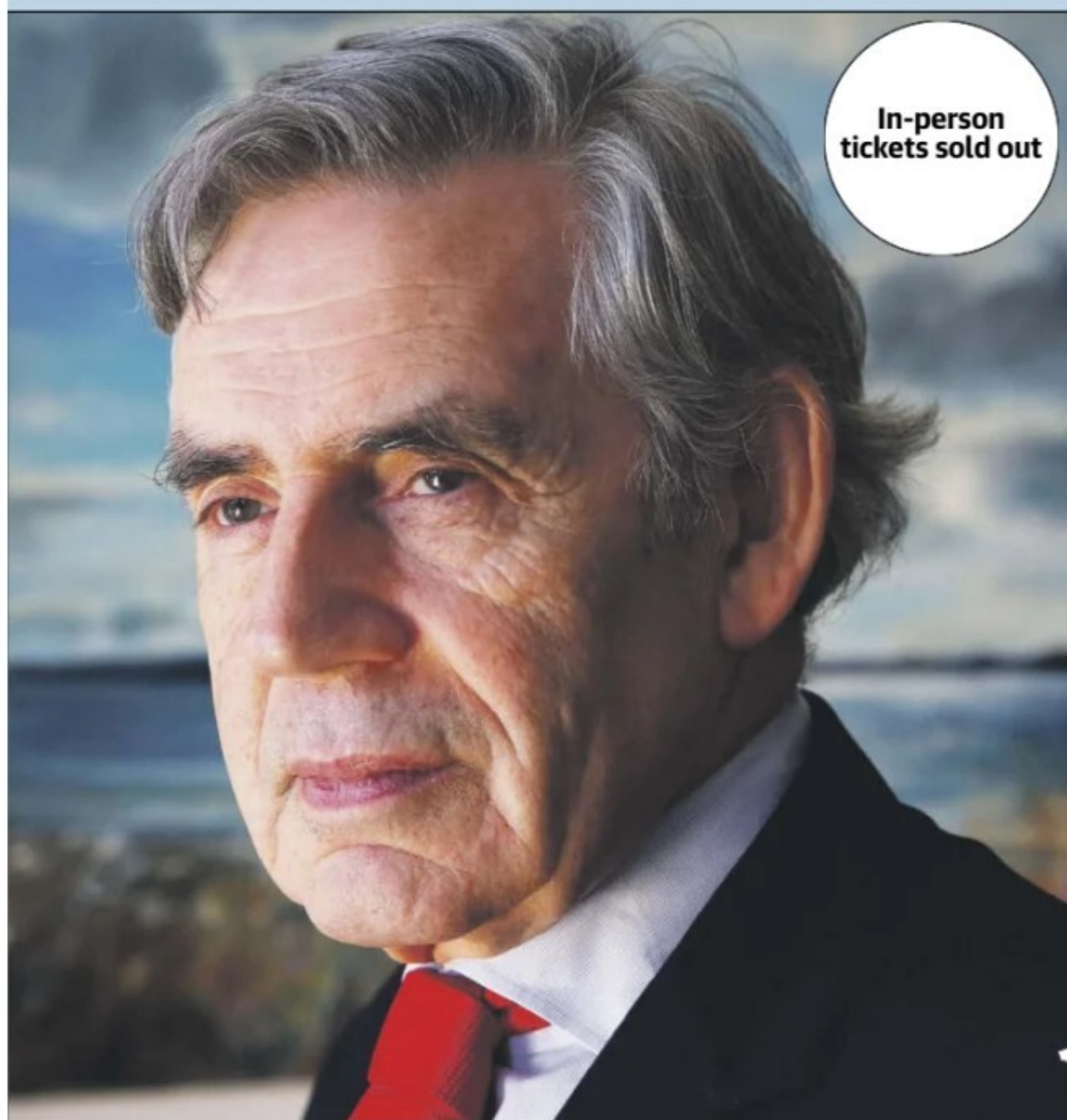
Octopus Energy, Great Britain's biggest energy supplier, also noted a sharp increase in solar panel sales within weeks of the Middle East conflict causing oil and gas prices to soar. The supplier said sales climbed by more than 54% in March compared with the month before.

In total there are more than 2m solar installations across Great Britain, just 15 years after the first large-scale solar farm was built in June 2011 on the site of a disused tin mine near Truro in Cornwall.

The 1.4MW Wheal Jane solar farm is now dwarfed by newer projects, including the 373MW Cleve Hill project in Kent, which became Britain's largest working solar development when it reached full power last summer, and the 800MW Springwell solar farm in Lincolnshire, which is expected to begin generating in 2029.

Meanwhile, by the end of August UK people living in flats or rented properties will be able to join the millions across Europe using balcony solar panels to lower their bills, according to legislation passed earlier this month.

The Guardian Live



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The future starts with us: Gordon Brown in conversation

Why is the fracturing of the rules-based order and the erosion of civic life happening at the same time? Why are millions across the world turning to populist nationalist parties in search of solutions? And what can we all do about it?

Gordon Brown will join the Guardian's **Hugh Muir** to uncover the intricate connections between global instability and civic decline. He'll also share a practical and hopeful roadmap to bring us back together and renew the global order, as explored in his new book, *The Future Starts With Us*.

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Stage review Revival of Sarah Kane's gory torture drama resonates even more today

Cleansed

Almeida theatre, London

★★★★★

Arifa Akbar

Sarah Kane was much berated for the graphic violence in her plays during her lifetime. But critics beware: if you choose to scold playwrights for too much blood-letting and grotesque acts of human cruelty, you would surely have to condemn the Greeks, the Grand Guignol and Shakespeare, too.

Perhaps it's the in-her-face nature of Kane's gore that offends. Certainly in this 1998 play there is no flinching from horror, which comes through acts of sensational cruelty. "Death isn't the worst thing they can do to you," a character reflects, and his words illustrate themselves with rapes, mutilations and beatings that follow.

In the case of *Cleansed* there are so many ways in which its revival can go wrong, not least because it is notoriously difficult to stage, with directions that require rats to walk away with amputated limbs and gigantic sunflowers to explode from the floor. It is courageous of director Rebecca Frecknall to take it on. The gamble pays off, both in its terrible resonance in our violent world and in her formidable creative accomplishment.

Kane's first play, *Blasted*, was a response to the conflict in Bosnia in the 1990s and this third play was part of an unrealised trilogy on war. Watching it today, in Frecknall's potent, moving and fantastically physical production, you are reminded of all the wars before (the cutting out of a character's tongue and his amputations are reminiscent of *Titus Andronicus*) and after. A scene in which the Kinks' song *Days* is piped into a torture cell, though tender, holds shades of "torture lite" in Guantánamo. Again and again, you are reminded of the photos from Abu Ghraib prison, which captured the humiliation of prisoners by

US guards. Israel's brutality and violence in Gaza echoes too.

Set in a university that seemed partly to evoke a concentration camp, Tinker (Leo Bill) is the sole "visible" torturer here (other violence is enacted by unseen agents of brutality). He is ostensibly unimposing, personifying Hannah Arendt's banality, perhaps. He targets those deemed sexually aberrant, particularly two gay men, Rod (Parth Thakerar) and Carl (Luke Cinque-White), but also terrorises brother and sister Graham (Jack Riddiford) and Grace (Pearl Chanda), manipulates a peep show dancer (Lizzy Connolly) and another prisoner called Robin (Stuart Thompson).

The cast acts out the play's many difficult scenarios with

no awkwardness or melodrama. Tinker's cruelty is still a puzzle, especially the functionality with which he tortures. Is he motivated by power, a guiding principle or sheer sadism? It is never explained.

Still, the message is clear: war and its torture is senseless, cruel and obvious for those close enough to it. There is the sense of an Orwellian system tyrannising those who are deemed aberrant in their gender or sexual identities. Madeleine Girling's stage design has the grimy, institutionalised feel of a hidden hallway in a psychiatric ward or prison. Again, it evokes a chilling ordinariness.

Like the rest of Kane's oeuvre, the play interrogates the limits of theatre and representation in its extremity and breakdown of



▼ Torturer Tinker (Leo Bill) with Woman (Lizzy Connolly). Above, Stuart Thompson plays Robin

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARC BRENNER

conventional form. Exposing the theatrical construction of violence, through various techniques, does little to protect us from the horror of observing it, and Frecknall vacillates masterfully between realism and a more poetic vein. When characters are in the furthest extremity of pain, their movements become a kind of expressive dance. There is lyricism in it but not so it beautifies violence. Importantly, it never seems gratuitous, either.

Sex is a kind of dance, too: bodies never make contact but intimacy and physical force is suggested through choreography. George Dennis's sound design, with Angus MacRae's compositions, combine powerfully with their blend of blazing romance and thrumming electric dread.

For such a slim play, it does feel protracted, and slows in its pace. The cruelty becomes draining to watch - but in a world in which images of violence are streamed on daily feeds, it re-sensitises us, through its dissection.

Until 29 August



Winehouse's father ordered to pay £950,000 to singer's friends

Agence France-Presse

The father of Amy Winehouse has been ordered to pay £950,000 costs to the late singer's friends, whom he unsuccessfully sued for auctioning the singer's clothes and other items.

In April Mitch Winehouse lost a case in the high court in London

against two of his daughter's friends who had sold scores of her possessions. The singer-songwriter died in 2011 from alcohol poisoning, aged 27. Her former stylist Naomi Parry and friend Catriona Gourlay denied acting dishonestly in auctioning the items they said had been given or lent.

The 155 items, auctioned in the US between 2021 and 2023, included handbags, earrings and makeup, as

well as a dress the singer wore on her final tour in 2011. The trial was told the friends "took advantage" of her father's forgetfulness and pocketed more than \$1.4m (£1m) in sales.

The judge found the women had not deliberately concealed any items from Mitch Winehouse, who "knew all along" about the intended sale and pursued them for money only after it was completed.

"The claimant chose to bring an inherently weak claim, pursue it aggressively and relentlessly

► Amy Winehouse with her father, Mitch, a year before her death



to the end, and make serious and unfounded allegations against the defendants which significantly damaged their reputations, career prospects, financial security and health," the judge, Sarah Clarke, said on Wednesday.

"The fact that he knowingly and deliberately did this to two young women who had stood faithfully by Amy ... makes his unreasonable conduct particularly serious."

In the April ruling, the judge noted Amy Winehouse was known for her "extraordinary generosity towards her friends and also those she barely knew".

World

Poland scrambles fighter jets after Russian missile explodes in field

Peter Beaumont

Russia was accused of violating Polish airspace, after a missile exploded in a field in the east of the country yesterday, triggering Nato air defences, in the midst of a massive air raid that killed 13 people in neighbouring Ukraine.

Polish authorities said the explosion near the village of Tarnawa-Kolonia, close to Lublin, had created a 10-metre-wide crater. Residents reported hearing an explosion at about 4am that shook the windows of their homes, police said.

Nato's supreme allied commander for Europe, Gen Alexus Grynkewich, said: "Nato will continue to take all necessary measures to defend Nato territory."

Speaking at the scene of the explosion, in a field about 50 miles from the Ukrainian border, the Polish prime minister, Donald Tusk, said the missile was most likely Russian. "From the analysis of most of the traces, the recovered fragments point to a Russian KH-101 missile," he told journalists.

He said there was no reason to think that Poland had been the target of the missile but said the Polish military had been prepared to shoot it down if it threatened a built-up area.

As the attacks on Ukraine took place, Poland - a Nato member - scrambled fighter jets to protect its airspace, its armed forces said.

Ukraine's foreign minister, Andrii Sybiha, said in a post on X that a Russian Kh-101 cruise missile had crossed into Poland.

The Russian embassy in Warsaw did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment.

António Costa, the president of the EU council, said on X: "Last night, Russia launched a massive combined strike against Ukraine. During the attack, Polish airspace was also violated, underlining once again that Russia's aggression is a threat to the security of Europe as a whole."

Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, said the Russian missile incident in Poland was another "unacceptable violation" of the EU's airspace.

At least 13 people in Ukraine - including one in Kyiv - died yesterday's attacks, which extended as far as the western city of Lviv.

A missile strike in the central city of Kryvyi Rih - Volodymyr Zelenskyy's home town - killed at least six people, including two girls, aged five and 12, the head of the town's military administration said. Zelenskyy had warned the country hours in advance of Moscow launching the massive attack.

Oleksandr Vilkul, the head of the defence council, said: "In a village on the outskirts of Kryvyi Rih, a direct strike by an Iskander-M ballistic missile, launched from Voronezh, hit a private house where a large family lived, killing girls aged five and 12, and four adults." Eight more people were wounded, he said.

Another six people, including two children, were killed in the regions of Dnipropetrovsk and Poltava.

The military administration for Kyiv confirmed one death, with the mayor, Vitali Klitschko, reporting fires in several districts. Earlier, he posted: "The enemy is attacking the capital with ballistic weapons. The threat of further attack remains present. Stay in shelters!"

In Lviv, rescue workers were scrambling to clear rubble to reach those trapped after Russian missiles damaged two blocks of flats and injured 26 people, officials said.

Late on Wednesday, Zelenskyy had posted: "The Russians prepared a massive attack several days ago, and there is a high probability that the strike will be carried out tonight ... Please, in all regions of Ukraine, pay attention to air raid alerts today and stay safe."

Zelenskyy also repeated his request to Ukraine's allies to supply Kyiv with the missiles its air defence system lacked. "It is important that our partners fully understand what is happening and that the protection of people's lives depends directly on their willingness, or lack of willingness, to provide air defence missiles."

Russia's defence ministry, commenting on the strikes, said it had used land-, sea- and air-launched missiles, as well as strike drones, during the raid, and claimed it had targeted military industrial facilities.

Elsewhere yesterday, the Ukrainian military struck four Russian tankers in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, Ukraine's drone forces commander, Robert Brovdi, said.

Brovdi said on the Telegram app that 205 tankers had been hit in the past three weeks.



Awol president? Cameroon speculates over lengthy absence

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'Time for reverie' Artists flocking to Ivorian seaside city

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▲ People take shelter at a metro station in Kyiv during a Russian missile strike yesterday as a resident surveys the damage to a market, right; in Poland, left, firefighters and police attend the scene of the crater thought to have been caused by another Russian missile near the village of Tarnawa-Kolonia, far left, as the Polish prime minister, Donald Tusk, speaks to reporters on site

PHOTOGRAPHS: OLEKSII FILIPPOV/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; ALINA SMUTKO/REUTERS



Thousands of migrants enter Spanish enclave from Morocco

Sam Jones
Madrid

The leader of a Spanish enclave in north Africa has called on the Madrid government to declare a national emergency after thousands of migrants swam and waded into the tiny territory from neighbouring Morocco in a matter of hours.

Videos shot at Tarajal beach in Ceuta yesterday showed crowds of people walking around the breakwaters and running on the sands and roads. Most appeared to be young men, but there were also families with women and children.

"Viva España!" some shouted to a freelance photographer working for the Associated Press, who was filming the scene.

A Guardia Civil spokesperson said the migrants were "massively entering from the sea" but could not provide any estimate of the numbers.

Spain's national broadcaster, TVE, reported that between 2,000 and 3,000 people had crossed into Ceuta, while the state news agency, Efe, said some had entered the territory by scaling the high border fence.

Juan Jesús Vivas, the president of Ceuta, demanded the deployment of additional police and soldiers "to guarantee the inviolability of the frontier" and citizens' safety.

Vivas warned on Wednesday that

migrant reception centres were overwhelmed, with hundreds of people sleeping on the streets.

He said Ceuta needed "more resources, more infrastructure, more regulation and effective coordination between all the administrations".

"We're not looking for privileges; we're looking for a fair and responsible solution," he added.

Although the central government announced that Fernando Grande-Marlaska, Spain's interior minister, will travel to Ceuta today, it said a national emergency could not be declared over a migration issue.

It added that such an emergency could be declared only over dire meteorological events – such as the current wildfires – or in the face of a volcanic or nuclear threat.

Pedro Sánchez, Spain's prime minister, said his government would provide "an immediate response" to the situation in Ceuta, which echoes the border crisis in 2021 when

▼ Migrants enter Ceuta from the sea yesterday after a Spanish supreme court ruling relaxed border rules

PHOTOGRAPH: REDUAN DRIS/EPA

more than 8,000 people arrived in just two days.

"We're mobilising all necessary resources, working with Moroccan and international authorities, and preparing the necessary measures to restore normalcy as soon as possible," he said in a post on X.

This month Spain's supreme court ruled that migrants intercepted at sea while attempting to reach Ceuta – or Spain's other north African territory of Melilla – could not be summarily returned under the enclaves' special border rejection regime.

The Guardia Civil spokesperson told Reuters: "It has been a slow trickle since the supreme court's ruling, but today has been an explosion."

Alberto Núñez Feijóo, the leader of the conservative opposition People's party, to which Vivas belongs, said the situation was desperate. "The government can't look the other way," he added, "because we are facing a national security crisis."

Moroccan government sources attributed the surge to "criminal organisations" and insisted that the country's cooperation with Spain remained "exemplary".



Portuguese call for minister to quit over school exams fiasco

Catarina Fernandes Martins
Lisbon

Pressure is growing on Portugal's education minister to resign amid student and teacher protests over his handling of this year's national school exams.

Fernando Alexandre is accused of failing to take responsibility for what critics say is an unprecedented and chaotic school exam season affecting children aged 14 to 18, prompting student protesters to call for him "to be given a fail".

At the centre of the controversy, which has plunged the Portuguese

education sector into its worst crisis in decades, is Alexandre's push to fully digitise the process for marking exams.

The centre-right government said the shift was necessary to modernise Portugal's public administration and make school evaluations "more rigorous and objective" for more than 260,000 students taking exams in primary and secondary schools.

But many parents, teachers and students have graded the change a failure and some people are contemplating pursuing legal action against the state. About 19,000 people have signed a petition calling for the annulment of all results this year.

From the start of the exam season in mid-June, schools reported errors in the allocation of papers, with retired teachers and at least one dead teacher being asked to mark. Some educators were told to mark subjects out of their areas of expertise.

While grading the exams, several teachers reported difficulty accessing the marking platform, missing continuation pages, incomplete student

answers, illegible scanned images and students' answers disappearing from the online system.

After the results were released, three days late in mid-July, thousands of students complained about extreme discrepancies between their predicted grades and the posted exam grades, with some realising their grades were still missing.

Upon requesting access to a copy of the exam, several students reported finding missing pages, unknown handwriting and answers due to switched tests, and, in some cases, lost exams. Some students with special educational needs have complained that during the digitisation of the tests, the tags identifying those additional needs were left out.

An education watchdog later said that 26,000 exams had been affected by software or grade boundary errors, and that more than 18,000 grades were being changed.

The fiasco is proving politically damaging but the prime minister, Luís Montenegro, has resisted calls to sack Alexandre.

Mystery over world's oldest leader after 53-day absence

Giovanni Wanneh Buea
Eromo Egbejule Accra

A record 53-day absence of the world's oldest head of state has renewed speculation in his native Cameroon about whether he is dead or alive, even though discussing his health is technically illegal.

On 7 June, Paul Biya, 93, departed for Switzerland with his wife, Chantal, for what officials described as a "brief private stay". Almost two months later, neither the president nor the first lady have addressed the country or been seen publicly.

Biya, who took office in 1982 after a seven-year stint as prime minister, has taken increasingly long absences from Cameroon in recent years, spending much of his time at the five-star InterContinental hotel in Geneva.

No official timetable has been announced for the president's return from his latest trip abroad, leaving Cameroonians to rely on a succession of conflicting statements from government officials.

The minister of communication, René Emmanuel Sadi, said Biya was in good health and "working from Geneva, where he currently resides". He added: "Reports claiming otherwise are pure fantasy and malicious manipulation aimed at destabilising opinion."

Jacques Fame Ndongo, a senior official from the ruling party and the higher education minister, said Biya had been "meticulously following the files submitted to him by his aides ... wherever he is".

The labour minister, Grégoire Owona, gave a different explanation, saying the president was on annual leave and comparing him to ordinary Cameroonian citizens. He said: "Paul Biya, elected by the Cameroonian people and paid by them, is a worker who has the right to annual leave. His employer is obliged to grant it. He informed his employer before leaving and will do the same upon his return."

Cameroonian authorities banned discussion of Biya's health in October 2024, during another absence. Nevertheless, local media have published



▲ Paul and Chantal Biya. There are rumours that the president is dead

claims in recent weeks that he is critically ill, and jokes about Biya being a work-from-abroad president have resurfaced on social media.

Mamadou Mota, the vice-president of the opposition Cameroon Renaissance Movement party, said Biya's latest absence had created a "glaring institutional vacuum". He said: "A country cannot be governed by remote control while critical socio-economic challenges go unaddressed."

Last November, Biya was sworn in for his eighth consecutive term, a month after a presidential election marred by widespread allegations

of irregularities and voter suppression. Although the constitutional council dismissed post-electoral complaints by opposition parties, many refused to recognise the outcome, arguing the vote had further eroded public confidence in Cameroon's democratic institutions.

Biya has yet to name a government since being sworn in for his latest term. With parliamentary and municipal elections expected in early 2027, many fear his prolonged absence could disrupt the electoral cycle.

Cameroon has the largest economy in central Africa, but unemployment rates, high inflation and poor public infrastructure are harming the prospects of its young people, who make up about two-thirds of its estimated population of 30.6 million.

Kohtem Sambit, secretary general of the opposition Movement for Patriotism and People's Prosperity, said: "If the president is on annual leave, he is still accountable to the Cameroonian people because he is paid with taxpayers' money. His whereabouts should therefore be disclosed."

In April, parliament reintroduced the office of vice-president, but the position has yet to be filled, leaving Cameroon without a designated deputy should the president become incapacitated.

As Biya's son and stepson reportedly jockey for position, public disagreements between cabinet ministers have become commonplace.

Quarter of young Africans believe aid cuts could be good

Sarah Johnson

A quarter of young Africans believe aid cuts by the US could have a positive impact, saying that losing foreign money will force leaders to confront and solve their own challenges, according to a survey.

In Ghana and Nigeria, 41% and 40% respectively of young people aged 18 to 24 were optimistic, with Liberia not far behind (37%). A further one in 10 (11%) of young people were uncertain about the impact, according to the African Youth Survey, which interviewed almost 5,000 people across 16 countries.

The Trump administration announced early last year that it was eliminating more than 90% of USAID's foreign contracts and \$60bn in US assistance around the world. US foreign aid had been designed to play a critical role in tackling poverty, hunger and inequality worldwide.

Other countries, including Britain, France and Germany, have also been slashing aid budgets. The UK announced last February that the aid budget would be cut from 0.5% of gross national income to 0.3% in 2027, its lowest level as a percentage of national income since records began. The UN target is 0.7%.

Ivor Ichikowitz, whose South African family foundation commissioned the report, said: "The big picture [from the survey] is that the youth is concerned about governments that are overly influenced by foreign powers. What they're saying is that African governments need to take agency and responsibility for their own reality."

The USAID cuts caused the closure of vital services, including maternity clinics, and medicine shortages at a time when UN agencies are struggling to find money for their humanitarian work and food insecurity has been worsened by the climate crisis.

According to the survey, nearly half of African youth (46%) believe the closure of USAID would have a damaging impact on their countries, with healthcare services and disease prevention seen as the areas most affected. This anxiety is highest in Mozambique (76%), followed by Kenya (63%) and Rwanda (63%), where youth feel the cuts will disproportionately affect the most vulnerable members of society.

41%

Proportion of Ghanaians aged 18 to 24 who said they were optimistic about the impact of US aid cuts

46%

Proportion of African youth who believed the closure of USAID would be damaging to their countries

US government mocked after AI Africa map mislabels all the countries

Reuters

A map of Africa mislabelled every country during a US state department presentation at a global conference in Brazil this week, causing a stir among attendees who took screenshots and posted them online.

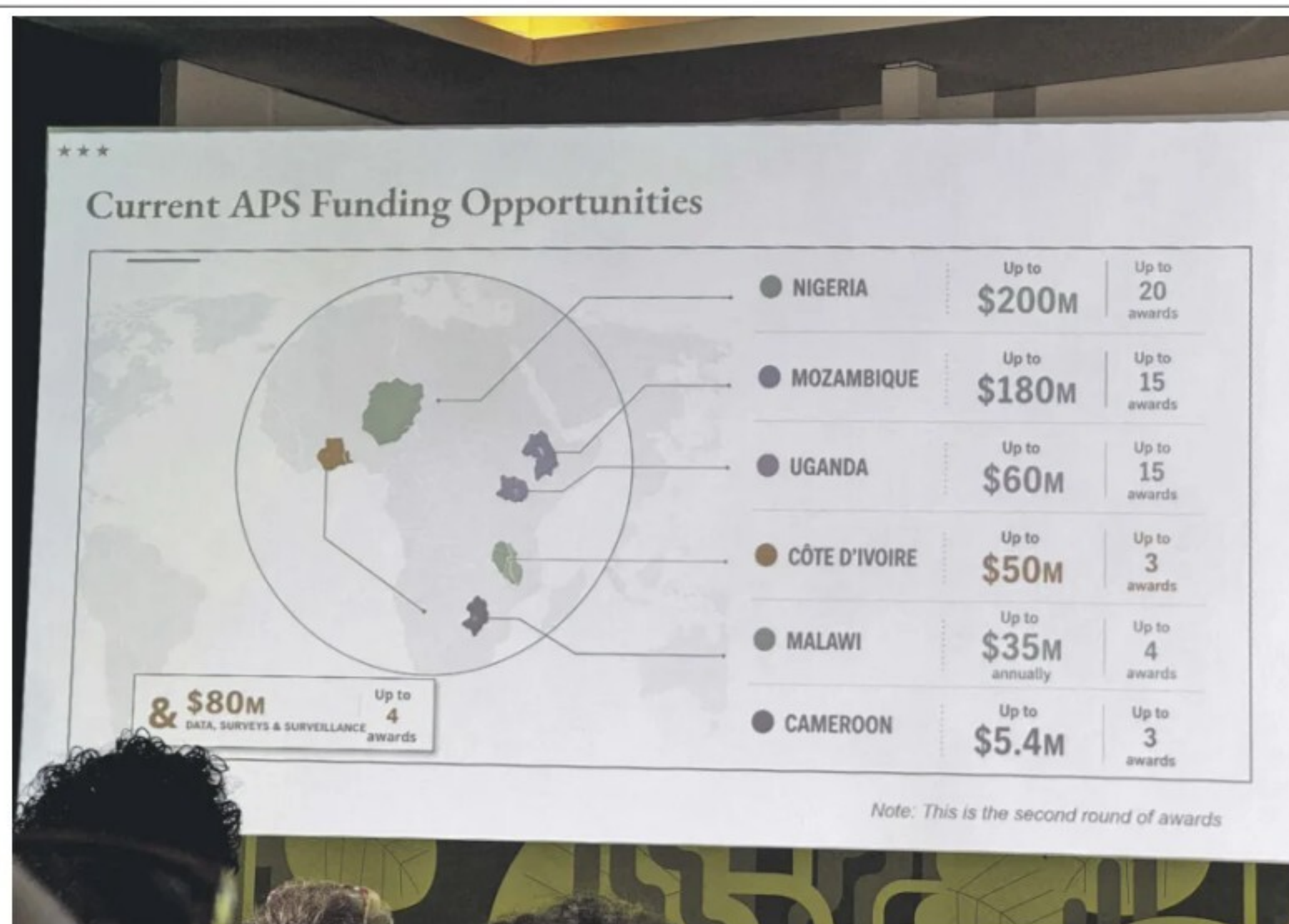
A video of the presentation, given at the Aids 2026 conference in Rio de Janeiro, shows the errant map displayed during a presentation about new health agreements.

Analysis found the image of the map contained an artificial intelligence watermark that signals it was made with OpenAI tools.

The state department said it took "full responsibility" for the confusion caused and that the map was produced by a team member who hastily changed the slide deck before the event. OpenAI did not respond to a request for comment.

The map showed Nigeria, where the US has several hundred troops deployed, as landlocked in the Sahara desert. Mozambique, which is in south-eastern Africa, was relocated to the Horn of Africa, while Côte d'Ivoire in west Africa was placed on the other side of the continent.

Screenshots of the map first appeared in a Substack post by the



▲ The map of Africa with countries mislabelled being shown at the US state department's presentation

PHOTOGRAPH: REUTERS

'Whoever created this slide did not know where countries in Africa are and did not care to check'

Matt Petit
AI and geopolitics expert

Aids expert Emily Bass and were widely shared on LinkedIn, with one post garnering about 40,000 views.

"Whoever created and approved this slide did not know where countries in Africa are and did not care to check their work," wrote Matt Petit, who focuses on AI and geopolitics at the Atlantic Council, in the post.

In a statement, the state department said: "We take full responsibility for the confusion and misrepresentation it caused for attendees, including our African partners."

The speaker at the conference was Jeff Graham, the top US health envoy who oversees the initiative known as

the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief, or PEPFAR. He did not reply to requests for comment.

The department said discussions at the conference were "substantive and constructive" despite the map and that it remained committed to fighting Aids with real results.

The Trump administration's decision last year to pause funding pending a review disrupted aid programmes worldwide, but PEPFAR's core work such as the provision of life-saving drugs has largely resumed.

The US is scaling back other areas of its spending including on prevention and surveillance.

'We'll sow regardless' India's farmers face deep uncertainty as 'super El Niño' builds

Neelima Vallangi

Kasturi Gamango and Pramila Sabar cannot contain their giggles as they explain one of the big attractions of the Raja festival. "We do no work for three days," they said. "Our husbands cook and clean while we enjoy our free time."

Raja is a vibrant agrarian celebration in the forested eastern Indian state of Odisha that celebrates fertility, womanhood and Basumati, the Hindu goddess of the Earth. Traditionally, the three-day event is held from 14 to 16 June to mark the start of the rainy season and the beginning of sowing crops. But this year the fields remained untouched and the skies clear. The monsoon did not arrive until the end of the month.

Global experts have declared that this year will see the onset of a "super" El Niño, an extreme version of the weather cycle, and expect it to intensify rapidly from July to September. In India, El Niño years are usually associated with a weak monsoon, delayed and uneven rainfall, dry spells and extreme temperatures, leading to agricultural droughts, increased energy use and water shortages as reservoirs are depleted.

June ended with a 40% shortfall in rain and, even with the excess rainfall this month, the effects of drought have not been mitigated. Still, Laxmipur's farmers cautiously sowed seeds in their paddy fields in the last days of June, hoping it would rain in time for germination.

Mangala Sabar, 45, remembers the 2023-24 El Niño years "when the transplanting attempts failed twice in each year, and we lost the entire crop".

During El Niño, the main concern for farming is reduced rainfall and lower soil moisture, said Nitin Bassi, a water management specialist at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water, a Delhi-based thinktank. "Monsoon happens after a peak summer in our country, and the soil is dry," he said. "If the soil is not saturated enough when it rains, there won't be any runoff going into the reservoirs, natural tanks and ponds, and there won't be sufficient water to supply for winter crops either."

In Mali Jagannathpur village, on the banks of the Rushikulya River, farmers wait for canal water to be released from a nearby reservoir once rainfall picks up, so they can

sow. But not all fields have access to canal water. Widowed four years ago, K Sukumari, 28, wanted to farm her husband's plot, but has been unable to grow rice owing to the water shortage.

"Five years ago, when I worked in the field with my husband, I remember there was water in the borewell and even rainfall was adequate," said Sukumari, who is raising her two children alone, one of whom needs special care.

The borewell has dried up, and rainfall has often been delayed and deficient for the past few years, she said. She works in a brick kiln factory for half the year and in other people's fields during the growing season to earn a living.

Chandni Singh, a lead author for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and researcher at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, said drought was not an unknown hazard in Odisha.

"We know that in any farming system, people are very smart," said Singh. "But you can't expect a farming household to endlessly adapt in place. The other thing, of course, farming households can do is diversify risk. So you start migrating."

Remittances sent home from family members have been a substantial source of income for many villages, according to Liby Johnson, executive director of Gram Vikas, a development organisation which has worked with Odisha's farming communities for nearly five decades. However, at the heart of their wellbeing and long-term resilience against the climate crisis is water security and weather certainty, he said.

Gram Vikas has launched a series of initiatives in Odisha's villages, including hyperlocal weather forecasting, detailed



◀ Daily life in the village of Laxmipur; below, Mangala Sabar with his weatherboard which he updates weekly; bottom, a tributary of the Rushikulya, one of Odisha's major rivers

PHOTOGRAPHS:
NEELIMA VALLANGI



'Five years ago, I remember there was water in the borewell and even rainfall was adequate'

K Sukumari
Agricultural worker



aquifer mapping to understand groundwater availability, and the building of low-cost soil and water conservation structures to enhance water retention.

Overlooking the hills of the Eastern Ghats, one of the 25 automatic weather stations installed by Gram Vikas stands on the roof of Mangala Sabar's house, at the entrance to Laxmipur village. The outer wall has been turned into a huge blackboard where weekly weather conditions and a seven-day rain forecast are written in the local Odia language. He receives the processed weather forecast information via WhatsApp and is responsible for updating the board.

The India Meteorological Department also launched an initiative last year to provide accurate forecasts of the monsoon's arrival up to 30 days in advance. Tailored forecasts are now being delivered to more than 38 million farmers via SMS and phone calls, including in Odisha.

Similarly, several El Niño-related advisories were issued by the government recommending farmers delay sowing, choose low-duration or other less water-intensive crops, and adopt drought-resilient varieties.

But uptake of this information remains limited. "The idea that data alone will influence a farmer's decision is flawed. People don't make decisions like that," said Singh. "The core information comes from their local knowledge, like reading the soil, the ants, the trees and the clouds."

With bursts of heavy rainfall across some parts this month, the overall monsoon deficit has narrowed to 21%. But there remains deep uncertainty as El Niño strengthens.

Farmers in Odisha are pushing on. "How can we know if it will rain adequately or not? We will sow the seeds regardless because we are farmers," said Mangala Sabar. "Let's see what happens."





Birds of a feather A flamboyance of flamingoes gathers at Lake Düden in Turkey. The lake is a crucial habitat for migrating flamingoes, who arrive in the spring when the water levels rise. In recent years, heatwaves have threatened the habitat, as the water recedes during the summer.

PHOTOGRAPH:
EFEKAN AKYUZ/
REUTERS

Merz opts for papal text over potboiler for holiday reading

Deborah Cole
Berlin

Summer is normally thought of as the time for potboilers and pageturners – airport reads that wind up sandy and sunscreen-stained. Not so for Friedrich Merz's holiday reading list.

Germany's embattled chancellor, who has faced one rough patch after another since he took office 14 months ago, seems to be seeking spiritual guidance this year while putting his feet up.

According to the conservative broadsheet *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the Christian Democratic Union leader is taking Pope Leo's encyclical on artificial intelligence, *Magnifica Humanitas* (Magnificent Humanity), on his break.

Introduced by the Guardian in May as "the first major text on safeguarding humankind of his papacy", the encyclical makes the case for the "most rigorous" ethical constraints on the march of technology, calling AI the biggest threat to humanity.

One of the world's 1.4 billion Roman Catholics, Merz tends to be private about matters of belief, so his



▲ Friedrich Merz, the German leader, has had a tough few months

beach reading speaks volumes. The 70-year-old politician has described AI as a challenge and a chance for Europe's top economy after seven years of stagnation, just as he has demanded streamlined EU rules to prevent red tape from snuffing out its potential.

In a speech in April, he said Germany was one of the world's leading nations in the use of AI, particularly in industry. Merz said he was banking on its power to boost productivity and prosperity as he faces a surge in support for the far right.

Despite the "euphoria" in some circles about how machines can alter the way we live, Merz said many Germans feared AI's power to eliminate

Vatican Leo puts faith before US

Pope Leo, the first US pontiff, has expressed "great love" for his home country and its core principles of freedom, opportunity and welcoming immigrants, but qualified that he "just happens to be American".

Leo, who has condemned the immigration policies of Donald Trump's administration, spoke to NBC about his family history while describing his relationship with the US. He said his grandparents were immigrants, while on his mother's side, "we have people who were both slaves and slave owners".

Asked how important being American was to him, Leo said: "I think of myself more as the pope who happens to be American. Not to belittle what it means to be an American. I have great love for America but I understand my mission as having a very important dimension, which is precisely being pastor of a universal church and having a voice and an opportunity to speak to people throughout the world."

Since being elected pontiff in May last year, Leo, 70, has spoken up for migrants and called Trump's immigration policies "inhuman".

Relations with the Trump administration further worsened after he condemned the US-Israeli war in Iran. Leo is yet to take up Trump's invitation to the White House. **Angela Giuffrida**

jobs and upend lives. "The question, however, is not whether we want AI or not," he said. "AI is here and is already being put to practical use. It is now up to us to decide what happens in this transformation."

It is perhaps fitting Merz would choose to wrestle with life's great moral questions while on his holiday, reportedly to be spent largely in Germany. His latest woes were touched off two weeks ago when the ambitious head of his CDU parliamentary group, Jens Spahn, announced he and his husband had welcomed a baby born to a surrogate in the US.

The move smacked of hypocrisy given the CDU's firm opposition to surrogacy, which is illegal in Germany, and Spahn quickly resigned. His departure sparked Germany's biggest cabinet reshuffle since the early 1960s.

The shake-up orchestrated by Merz went off chaotically, with one designated minister pulling out at the last minute, leaving the sitting official he was to replace hung out to dry until he finally stepped down to preserve his own "dignity".

The shambolic proceedings have led to intrigue worthy of a political thriller, with talk of a "palace revolt" against Merz and speculation over whether he would make it in office until Christmas. After his return to Berlin, Merz will face three state elections in September in which the far-right AfD could see record results.

With the impression of disarray taking hold, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* could not resist noting that Merz's other title for the book pile was a novel called *Ship of Fools*.

Pesticides may be to blame for Kenya elephant deaths, says wildlife agency

Carlos Mureithi
Nairobi

The deaths of 15 elephants in southern Kenya were probably caused by the animals' ingestion of pesticides used on tomato farms, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) has said.

Erustus Kanga, the agency's director general, told Citizen TV that analysis of samples collected from the carcasses had found traces of cyanide, a chemical compound used in farming as a predator control poison and a pest fumigant, which has also been used by poachers.

The deaths occurred in the Kimana sanctuary and Kuku Group ranch areas around Amboseli national park, an area covering 150 sq miles and that, together with other neighbouring conservancies, are home to more than 1,600 elephants.

The town of Kimana is a leading tomato producer and a place where researchers at the Route to Food Initiative, a food rights programme, have previously reported the use of a cyanide substance on the crop.

Isaac Lekolool, the head of veterinary and capture services at KWS, told Citizen TV that the stomach contents of one member of a herd included "lots of tomatoes," suggesting agrochemical poisoning.

Kanga warned that the effects could reach a wider population, as livestock may also eat from farms in the area.

"We have the goats, we have the cattle that are there. Eventually, if this cyanide is truly the one that is in the system, then we are going to see a bigger impact."

On Tuesday, KWS announced it was investigating the deaths of the elephants from 24 June and 24 July in Amboseli.

Benson Leyian, the chief executive of Big Life Foundation, a conservation organisation that operates in the area surrounding Amboseli national park, said the elephant deaths were a cause for concern.

"Thanks to decades of community-centred conservation, the Amboseli elephant population is one of the best protected in Africa, and elephant poaching has been virtually eliminated here. Aside from losses during periods of severe drought, we haven't seen a cluster of elephant deaths like this for some time," he said.



▲ The deaths occurred in the area around Amboseli national park

'Very calm and soothing'

Ivorian artists breathe new life into city once hit by jihadists

Eromo Egbejule
Grand Bassam

By the poolside of La Fourchette de Rôze hotel in Grand Bassam, a Côte d'Ivoire city sandwiched between the Ébrié lagoon and the Atlantic Ocean, a birthday party was in progress. On the second-floor gallery, the artist Nuits Balnéaires stood by a huge painting in one corner and looked out through the window towards the Atlantic Ocean.

"It's poetic ... that immense energy of the ocean, which also fuels my work," the Ivorian visual artist said. "The natural elements are the very essence and foundation of my artistic practice," he added, as he reflected on the way in which his name, which translates as "coastal nights", matched the ambience.

Many families in Abidjan, the commercial capital of the west African country, have often drifted to Grand Bassam, just 30 miles to the east, for Sunday relaxation, including Nuits Balnéaires, whose visits from childhood gave him a strong connection to the city. In July 2019 he moved there permanently from his family home in Abidjan.

In the past decade, it has become a road well travelled. As rents continue to rise amid a cost of living crisis in Abidjan, residents there, especially artists, have been reconsidering their lives in the city.

"It [is] increasingly difficult for many artists to maintain studio spaces in the city," said the Abidjan-based art collector Ozong Agborsangaya-Fiteu. "As a result, they are seeking more affordable alternatives in places such as Grand Bassam, Bingerville, and increasingly even farther afield in Dabou and Jacqueville. Grand Bassam itself is becoming more expensive, prompting some artists to relocate even farther out."

The biggest beneficiary of the exodus from Abidjan has undisputedly been Grand Bassam, the country's first capital, where the colonial architecture was listed as a Unesco world heritage site in 2012. With its scenic beachfronts, fresher food, cheaper markets, proximity to the airport and a sense of nostalgia even in the abandoned colonial buildings, the city represents an easier option than Abidjan, its livelier and more chaotic cousin.

This, for the Guadeloupe-born artist Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux, makes it "a very calm and soothing place that's conducive to working and finding inspiration". Five



Sculpture by the Ivorian artist Jems Robert Koko Bi

'Bassam offers you time for reverie, unlike Abidjan, which is always effervescent'

Aïcha Fall Ivorian-French photographer

▲ **Ganamet house in Grand Bassam, an abandoned colonial-era building that today hosts**

exhibitions and underground parties. Left and below, La Fourchette de Rôze hotel has become a hub

for creatives. Bottom, Nuits Balnéaires in the courtyard of his studio

PHOTOGRAPHS: AÏCHA FALL/THE GUARDIAN



years ago, he moved from Paris to Abidjan, and then two years ago to Grand Bassam, where he now has a studio and apartment.

Once a centre of cultural trade and tourism, Grand Bassam lost some of its appeal as Abidjan became more cosmopolitan and opportunities in the arts increased. A jihadist attack in 2016 that left 19 people dead also punctured the town's reputation.

Evidence of its renaissance abounds. Last year, the former colonial customs and post office building was reopened after a restoration project as La Maison de l'Art, a contemporary art museum with a sculpture garden and a cafe. At the launch, the culture minister, Françoise Remarck, said the collaboration between the private and public sector to protect local history and shine a spotlight on the country's modern art was a "fresh breath of life" to the old city.

"Today, we are doing much more than opening the doors of a space dedicated to art," she said. "We are taking an act of recognition and appreciation of African artistic genius."

Other organisations in the vicinity are following the same route. La Fourchette de Rôze has become a creative hub: in January 2023, it began an artist-in-residence programme that has brought in more than two dozen artists and musicians from all over the globe, including Nuits Balnéaires. La Cocoteraie des Arts, a creative space with an open-air art atelier and gallery in Mondoukou, only a few minutes outside the city, also offers artist residences.

Across Grand Bassam, dozens of new studios are popping up across the city. This year, the Ivorian-French photographer Aïcha Fall will add another to that number. "I grew up in the French countryside and I've always loved a place that is calm," said Fall, who moved to Grand Bassam on her return from Paris in 2023, despite an attachment to Abidjan where she had spent her early years. "Bassam represents all of that. It offers you time for reverie, unlike Abidjan, which is always effervescent."

Some enthusiastic followers of the art scene are predicting that the city could eventually upstage Abidjan as an art haven in the coming years, or at least rival it.

Not everyone in the industry is as optimistic. Most of Côte d'Ivoire's galleries and art institutions remain in Abidjan, as do many of the collectors, patrons and other elements of the ecosystem. Festivals such as Abidjan art week still bring people in from across the continent and are yet to be replicated elsewhere.

"Rather than weakening the scene, this geographical shift has created a different dynamic," Agborsangaya-Fiteu said. "Artists benefit from more affordable and inspiring places to work while remaining close enough to the city."

As he sipped his coffee, Nuits Balnéaires agreed, before saying it was a bit like having his cake and eating it. "In Bassam, you can feel very disconnected, yet at the same time, you're not that far removed from what's happening in Abidjan."

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**FTSE 100**
-11.14

10897.27

**All share**
-3.27

5853.32

**Dow Indl**
+490.63

52084.77

**Nikkei 225**
+433.24

61867.43

£/€
1.1672

-0.0003

£/\$
1.3428

+0.0139

SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

Business

Bank holds interest rates at 3.75% amid inflation fears over Iran war

▼ Despite the hold, investors expect a rise in borrowing costs to 4% by the end of the year

PHOTOGRAPH: HENRY NICHOLLS/AFP

Richard Partington

Senior economics correspondent

The Bank of England kept UK interest rates on hold yesterday as it said a further escalation in the Iran war could drive inflation above 4% next year, adding to cost of living pressures on households.

Against a volatile backdrop in the Middle East conflict, the Bank's monetary policy committee voted six to three to keep its key base rate at 3.75%.

As Donald Trump's renewed attacks on Iran drive up global energy prices, the Bank said an "adverse scenario" involving a drawn-out war and oil prices remaining above \$100 a barrel could push UK inflation to a peak of 4.5% by the middle of 2027.

However, on a day of fresh US strikes in the conflict, Andrew Bailey, the Bank's governor, played down suggestions that Threadneedle Street was edging closer to raising rates.

In a press conference after the decision was announced, he said there was little sign that inflationary pressures were becoming entrenched because the growth outlook for the UK economy remained weak.

"Please do not leave this room thinking that the Bank of England is edging towards a [interest rate] hike because, frankly, there's nothing in what I said, and I think any of us have said, along those lines," Bailey said.

Official figures showed inflation in the UK fell by more than expected in June to 2.6%, down from a peak of 3.8% last year. It had been on track to fall close to 2% before the outbreak of the US-Israeli war on Iran.

The Bank said a loose labour market and higher borrowing costs for households and businesses



compared with before the war would reduce inflation over time.

The decision to keep interest rates unchanged is expected to give Andy Burnham a boost in his push to lower the cost of living. He has announced a sweeping package of support in his first week as prime minister.

Markets had priced in a more than 90% probability of the Bank keeping borrowing costs on hold. Investors expect a rise in borrowing costs to 4% before the end of the year.

Brent crude, the international benchmark for oil, briefly rose above \$100 a barrel last week before falling back, amid fears that the violence

Fed spooks investors

US government borrowing costs have hit their highest level since 2007 after the Federal Reserve voted to hold its key interest rate steady, feeding fears that the central bank may not move fast enough to tame a rise in inflation triggered by the war in Iran. The decision has spooked investors who are worried about the US economy's ability to absorb a rise in inflation triggered by the war with Iran. **Lauren Almeida**

across the Middle East could shatter the world economy's earlier resilience to the Iran war. It was trading at a little below \$90 yesterday. The Bank of England said that under its central forecast - involving the oil price falling back to about \$71 a barrel - it still expected UK inflation to peak at about 3.2% later this year.

Paul Dales, the chief UK economist at the consultancy Capital Economics, said: "Much depends on what happens to energy prices and whether or not that leads to the second-round inflation effects that could transform a temporary rise in inflation into a longer-lasting one."

Analysis

Phillip Inman

Trump's failure to end conflict is what is driving prices above target

There is a threat of high inflation coming to the UK but only from the conflict in the Middle East, which could keep oil prices high for much longer than was expected when Donald Trump first began attacking Iran. Senior UK central bankers believe it is the war that makes the difference between a benign outlook

for inflation and one that puts it back on a rising trajectory.

The Bank of England's monetary policy committee (MPC) was clear in its decision yesterday to hold interest rates at 3.75% that underlying pressures on inflation are almost entirely absent in the domestic economy. Prices are stable and, without the war, would be rising at the Bank's 2% target.

Supermarkets have proved resilient and kept food inflation low, and services companies - for so long after the pandemic a source of rising prices - have managed to restrict increases this year.

As the Bank's quarterly review says: "So far, there are few signs of second-round effects. But there is not enough evidence yet to rule out this risk, and the MPC will continue to monitor evidence closely."

Annual wage increases are low across the private sector, at 2.8% in the second quarter of this year. They are expected to rise to 3% in the third quarter, but that increase keeps wage increases at a level Bank officials are comfortable with.

As for companies capitalising on a period of rising prices whether or not it actually affects them, the official data does not

show that happening across the manufacturing, construction or services industries.

The majority on the MPC focused more on the labour market and a rise in unemployment and sharp fall in vacancies over the past three years. They also see that financial markets have reacted by raising mortgage and commercial lending rates, tightening the screw on homebuyers and firms without the Bank making a move itself.

If anything, businesses that want to invest, and employ more people, could do with a boost from lower interest rates. Only Trump's failure to confect an exit from the Middle East crisis stands in the way of that. The Bank's forecasters expect inflation to peak at 3.2% next spring, but say it could be much higher, at 4.1%, if the war persists.

Airbus is fined £6m in UK for breaching rules over military hardware

Rob Davies

Airbus has been fined £6.4m in the UK after the European aerospace firm admitted breaching rules to stop sensitive goods such as military hardware falling into the wrong hands.

The company, which sits at the heart of the European defence industry, said it had paid the settlement to the UK's tax authority, HM Revenue and Customs, after self-reporting breaches that occurred before November 2022.

HMRC said the offences related to Airbus's failure to keep records of the export or transfer of controlled technology over a sustained period.

The UK's export control licensing regime is designed to prevent strategic goods such as military hardware and items that can be used in weapons of mass destruction programmes from being sold overseas or to sanctioned individuals and countries.

The £6.4m payment is the highest out-of-court settlement ever reached by HMRC for strategic export offences and more than 10 times higher than the £569,100 that an Aberdeen-based division of the energy company Petrofac paid last month for breaching Russia sanctions regulations.

Airbus cooperated with HMRC's investigation, but its failure to follow the rules is notable, given the pivotal role it plays in Europe's defence sector, working on projects including the Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jet and the A400M heavy cargo aircraft.

The deputy director of HMRC's fraud investigation service, Edwige Hill, said: "We use a range of powers to ensure effective controls and enforcement on military goods, which contributes to UK national security. This settlement shows we will not hesitate to take action."

HMRC said the breaches included failing to keep accurate records of transfers of controlled technology as per the conditions of three of their open general export licences (Ogels).

In its statement to investors, the company said its UK division "fully cooperated with the investigation and implemented appropriate remediation measures. This settlement closes and fully resolves the matter."

The sanctions lawyer Nigel Kushner, who is chief executive of law firm W Legal, said the fine would shake up compliance. "This is a wake up call for UK exporters. It is not enough to obtain licences or rest on your laurels utilising pre-approved licences available to all."

Business view

Nils Pratley



With huge opportunities on various fronts, the outlook gets better and better at Rolls-Royce

Tufan Erginbilgic, the chief executive of Rolls-Royce, seemed to be getting ahead of himself when he said a year ago that the engine-maker had the potential to become the most valuable company on the London Stock Exchange.

Yes, everyone knows about the remarkable turnaround. Rolls was a corporate calamity during the Covid shutdown of global aviation, then a tenfold increase in the share price followed under Erginbilgic. But it still required a leap of imagination to think it could challenge the very top of the capitalisation charts one day.

And it still requires work. Today's valuation of £120bn puts

Rolls roughly neck-and-neck with the miner Rio Tinto for fourth place in the Footsie, but there is still a big gap to Shell (£185bn), AstraZeneca (£198bn) and HSBC (£274bn), none of whom intend to stand still.

Erginbilgic's long-term bullishness, however, sounds less fantastical with every set of results. Yesterday's half-year numbers came with the usual upgrade to financial forecasts. Cashflow over the full year will be £200m better than previously predicted at £3.8bn-£4bn; for operating profits, the increase was £700m to £4.7bn-£4.9bn. Those upgrades suggest there is still mileage in Erginbilgic's efforts to invest in the reliability of the engines to allow a "win-win" renegotiation of contracts with airlines.

The long-term growth projections, however, rely on many other things going well. Defence looks a safe bet, naturally. The sight of the prime minister at Barrow-in-Furness yesterday served as a reminder that Rolls makes the nuclear propulsion systems for the UK's submarines.

The rest of the UK's defence investment plan is unambiguously good news for Rolls too. There are possibilities in propulsion systems for uncrewed aircraft and much more.

The division that is suddenly getting most attention, though, is power systems. It used to be seen as a maker of boring old-tech diesel systems for marine vessels and military tanks. But AI datacentres in the US also want the equipment. And they also want Rolls' gas-fired turbines for primary power as they struggle to get hooked up to an under-invested US electricity grid. Rolls' order book for power generation was up 55% in the half.

It looks, too, as if there will be spill-over AI benefits for Rolls' small modular reactors (SMRs). At 470MW, SMRs were originally intended only as sources of low-carbon power for national grids, but some hyperscale datacentre projects in the US are so huge and power-hungry that they have become potential customers. It



▲ Rolls was a corporate calamity during the Covid aviation shutdown

The company is positioned squarely at the centre of 'major global trends': defence, AI and energy transition via nuclear

gives Rolls a foot in several AI power camps: diesel for back-up; gas for primary power; and SMRs when they arrive in the 2030s.

The very big possibility is Rolls' intended re-entry into the market for engines for narrow-body aircraft. That is a slower story since Airbus and Boeing have yet to commit formally to new single-aisle aircraft models. Nor is it guaranteed that Rolls would win a place as an engine supplier given the competition from incumbents.

But the potential market is enormous – many times the size of the wide-body one – which is why Rolls' requests for financial support from the UK Treasury will almost certainly be granted. Subsidies are a fact of life in the international aerospace business, a point that will surely not be lost on a reindustrialising prime minister.

If it all comes together, then, yes, Erginbilgic's projections for Rolls' potential are not as wild as they seem. The company is positioned squarely at the centre of "major global trends", as he puts it: defence, AI and energy transition via nuclear. One of these days, something will go wrong, just as it did regularly at Rolls for about two decades. But it is also impossible to name another major UK company with huge opportunities on multiple fronts.

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Shell's profits double after Iran conflict drives up oil prices

Lauren Almeida
Jillian Ambrose

Shell has recorded its second highest quarterly earnings on record after the energy market surge caused by the Middle East crisis helped to double its net profit to almost \$10bn in the three months to June.

Europe's biggest oil and gas company reported a quarterly profit of \$9.8bn (£7.4bn), more than double the figure for the second quarter last year and the highest since its record high earnings in the months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The company, which is behind plans to develop the Jackdaw gasfield in the North Sea, revealed its earnings before a planned meeting between the new prime minister, Andy Burnham, and Shell's chief executive, Wael Sawan, who is expected to urge the government to develop North Sea projects.

Sawan told CNBC the prime minister's office had "reached out, and we're hoping to schedule a discussion soon".

He added: "The biggest thing that can be done at the moment is to continue to support the development of the North Sea, to continue to invest in renewables, to continue to provide



targeted support to those who need it in these difficult times ... we will offer any support that we can to the government as they try to navigate these difficult waters."

Robert Palmer, the deputy director at the campaign group Uplift, which opposes North Sea development, accused Shell of "maniacal behaviour" for "putting its profits ahead of the health of our planet".

"As families and firefighters across Europe battle devastating wildfires, Shell is cashing in on Trump's war and doubling down on oil and gas," he said. "The world is literally on fire and Shell wants to add more fuel."

The severe disruption in global energy markets since the US-Israeli attacks on Iran in late February led to a 30% drop in Shell's gas production in the last quarter compared with the same period a year ago, after its gas-to-liquids plant in Qatar was damaged by Iranian drones.

The company was more than able to offset the lost earnings, however, as a result of higher global market prices and savvy trading. In its liquified natural gas business, earnings grew to \$2.7bn in the second quarter,

▲ Environmental campaigners demonstrate outside Shell UK's headquarters in London this week

PHOTOGRAPH: YUI MOK/PA WIRE

up 55% from last year. Its chemicals and products business, which is home to its oil trading desk, reported earnings of \$2.3bn, up sharply from \$118m a year ago and the division's highest quarterly profit since 2021.

"We have one of the world's largest and strongest trading capabilities," Sawan told CNBC. "And that allows us to deal with times like this."

The global oil price has climbed from about \$61 a barrel in January to

highs of \$126 at the end of April, after Iran's effective blockade on flows of oil and gas through the strait of Hormuz. The market volatility has included some of the sharpest price swings on record, which traders are able to use to amplify their profits. Brent crude was trading at just below \$90 a barrel yesterday.

Rudy Schulkind, at Greenpeace, said the environmental group was "running out of words to describe the obscenity" of huge profits at Shell.

"Europe is engulfed by apocalyptic wildfires, communities across Asia are reeling from devastating floods, and the UK battles through drought and yet more dangerous heat," he said. "These aren't anomalies, they're the defining story of the fossil fuel age. Shell takes the profits, and the rest of us pick up the catastrophic bill."

Schulkind called on the government to implement a windfall tax on big oil companies and to use the revenue "to help households with the cost of living, strengthen our resilience against extreme weather, and supercharge the transition to clean, affordable energy".

\$9.8bn

Shell's net profits for the second quarter, more than double those for the same period last year

30%

The fall in Shell's gas production in the last quarter after a plant in Qatar was hit by Iranian drones

Lloyds Bank to cut further £2bn in costs as it turns to AI

Kalyeena Makortoff
Banking correspondent

Lloyds Banking Group said yesterday it would cut another £2bn of costs as part of a four-year plan under which its chief executive would use new tech and AI to drive growth.

Charlie Nunn said the strategy, which the UK's largest high street lender plans to launch in January, would involve investing £13bn into the business by 2030, including for "pioneering technology" to lure new business, improve efficiency and increase payouts for shareholders.

It would involve rolling out "AI-powered advice" for wealth and workplace pensions, using it to offer

personalised offers based on customer behaviour, and support and guidance to relationship managers.

While Nunn praised colleagues for guiding customers through "increasingly complex services", he said: "We can make it even better, and even simpler because we're not good enough today relative to our ambition."

When asked how staff would be affected by £2bn in planned cuts, Nunn said he would consider the same business areas that were in the bank's crosshairs over the past five years, without giving details of potential job losses.

As for the future of Lloyds's 550 branches, Nunn said: "We're going to follow the customers and our customer data around our branches."

The strategy also pointed to international expansion, with Lloyds aiming to grow its corporate and institutional banks in the US and Europe, marking a shift from the retrenchment that followed the lender's bailout at the height of the 2008 financial crisis.

Nunn said he was also betting on AI and blockchain technology to cut waiting times for mortgage approvals to about three days, adding that the bank would also boost rewards and loan discounts to retain customers.

Lloyds said it would double down on its car loan division, which is still waiting to settle the long-running

motor finance commission scandal, by creating an app for drivers wanting to buy, insure and set up charging points for electric vehicles.

Chris Beauchamp, the chief market analyst at the investing and trading platform IG, said: "The push towards the US and more corporate banking is understandable, but Lloyds would hardly be the first UK name to follow this demanding path. Success here is far from guaranteed."

"Lloyds has the heft in its home market, but a move to a bigger global player is a significant undertaking."

Lloyds reported better-than-expected second-quarter profits, which rose to £2.3bn between April and June, a 14% jump from the same period last year.

It meant bosses could increase payouts for shareholders, with a 1.58p a share dividend and the first ever share buyback announced at half-year, worth £1bn.

Lloyds shares rose 3.8% to 115.58p yesterday in response to the news.



▲ Charlie Nunn, the chief executive of Lloyds Banking Group, did not say how many staff would be affected by the cuts

Defence firms report earnings rise as states boost arms spending

Jasper Jolly

Rolls-Royce and BAE Systems are expecting higher profits as governments around the world boost their defence spending.

Both companies lifted their earnings guidance yesterday, citing commitments from governments to increase investment in defence systems.

Rolls-Royce makes jet engines for combat planes and commercial aircraft, turbines for ships and submarines, and small nuclear power plants. It raised its forecast for underlying operating profit this year to £4.7bn-£4.9bn, up from previous guidance of £4bn-£4.2bn. It also increased its free cashflow forecast from £3.6bn-£3.8bn to £3.8bn-£4bn.

Rolls-Royce has benefited from the jump in defence spending since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, while its power generation unit has experienced increased demand from datacentres used by AI companies. Revenues have soared in its engines business for civilian passenger jets as long-haul flights have recovered after the pandemic.

The company told shareholders it should benefit from the commitments made at the recent Nato summit, including for Saab GlobalEye, an airborne early warning system, and MQ-4C Triton, a high-altitude aerial surveillance system. Both use Rolls-Royce engines.

Tufan Erginbilgic, who took over as chief executive of Rolls-Royce in 2023, said the "transformation" of the company was continuing to produce results.

"We have made significant operational and strategic progress in the first half of the year," Erginbilgic said. "In civil aerospace, where we continued to improve our after-market profitability, we have also effectively eliminated aircraft on ground, providing a significant operational benefit to our customers. In defence, we continued to establish our leading position in autonomous propulsion, with several key milestones achieved in the period."

Shares in Rolls-Royce jumped by 5.5% yesterday morning, making it the top riser in the FTSE 100.

BAE Systems reported that sustained increases in defence budgets around the world meant it had upgraded its profit forecasts. It now expects earnings to rise by 10% to 12%, slightly higher than the 9% to 11% estimate it had previously given.

BAE makes a large proportion of the UK's weapons, from tanks and fighter jets to munitions. It has benefited from demand in the US, which had increased weapons spending even before its war on Iran, and other export allies of the UK, including several countries in the Gulf.

Weather

Friday 31 July 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today

Sunny

Mist

Fog

Sunny intervals

Hazy

Mostly cloudy

Overcast/dull

Sunny showers

Sunny and heavy showers

Light showers

Rain

Sleet

Light snow

Snow showers

Heavy snow

Ice

Thundery rain

Thundery showers

Temperature, °C

Wind speed, mph

Windy

35C

30

25

20

15

10

5

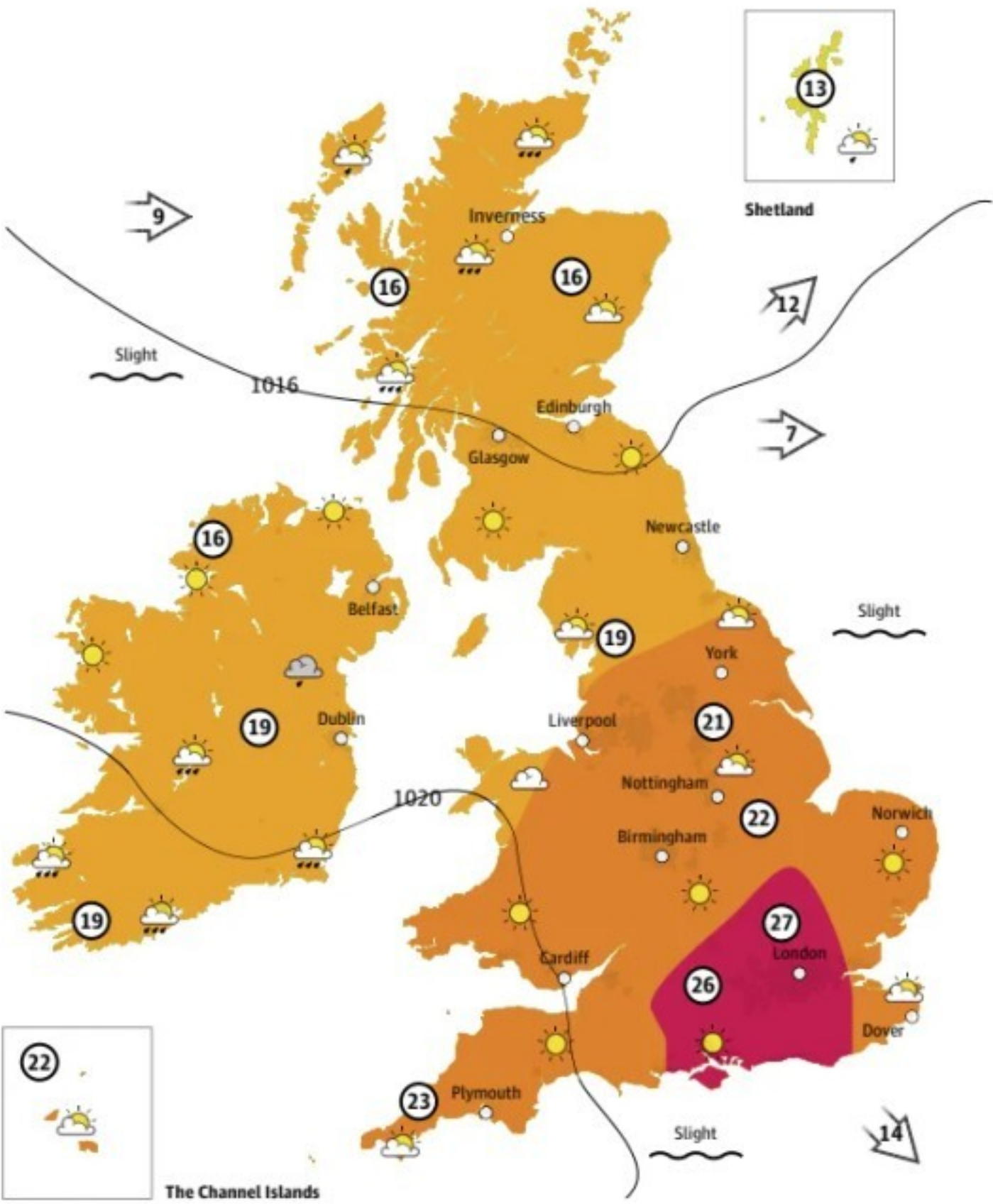
0

-5

-10

-15

-20



Forecast

Low 10 High 20

Tomorrow

Low 10 High 23

Sunday

Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO₂ readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

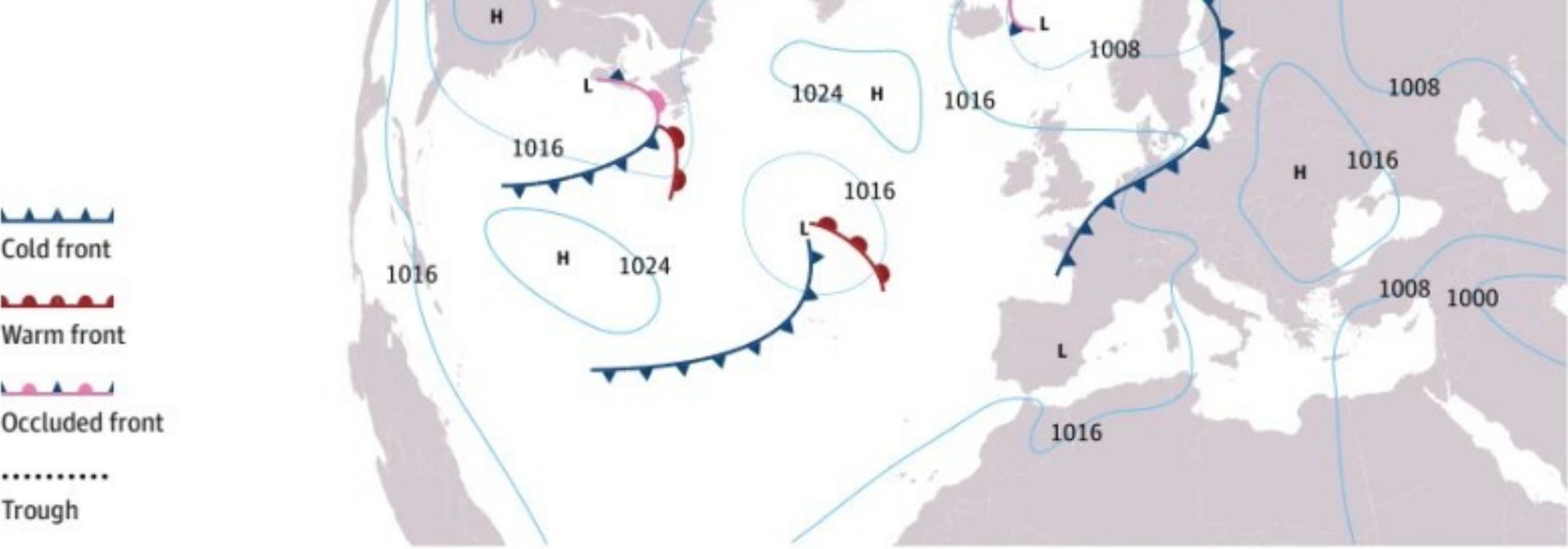
Latest	
28 Jul 2026	429.01
Weekly average	
19 Jul 2026	428.72
30 Jul 2025	427.58
30 Jul 2016	403.35
Pre-industrial base	280
Safe level	350

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

London	Lows and highs	Precipitation	Air pollution
13 27	0%	Low	
Manchester	10 20	5%	Low
Edinburgh	9 17	75%	Low
Belfast	10 17	60%	Low
Birmingham	11 23	0%	Low
Brighton	12 23	0%	Low
Bristol	12 22	0%	Low
Cardiff	12 21	0%	Low
Newcastle	9 18	55%	Low
Penzance	15 21	0%	Low

Atlantic front



High tides

Aberdeen	0207	4.2m	1442	4.0m
Avonmouth	0818	12.0m	2034	12.3m
Barrow	0008	8.8m	1231	8.5m
Belfast	--	--	1209	3.1m
Cobh	0625	3.8m	1843	3.9m
Cromer	0719	4.9m	2001	4.7m
Dover	--	--	1208	6.4m
Dublin	0006	4.0m	1238	3.7m
Galway	0619	4.7m	1825	4.9m
Greenock	0113	3.4m	1330	3.0m
Harwich	0043	3.7m	1251	3.8m
Holyhead	1126	5.1m	2336	5.5m
Hull	0709	7.2m	1943	6.9m
Leith	0328	5.3m	1555	5.3m
Liverpool	--	--	1213	8.8m

London Bridge	0252	6.8m	1508	6.8m
Lossiemouth	0041	4.0m	1313	3.8m
Millford Haven	0713	6.5m	1930	6.8m
Newquay	0603	6.4m	1820	6.7m
North Shields	0413	4.9m	1646	4.7m
Oban	0651	3.7m	1910	3.9m
Penzance	0538	5.1m	1755	5.4m
Plymouth	0651	5.0m	1901	5.3m
Portsmouth	0012	4.4m	1244	4.5m
Southport	--	--	1154	8.5m
Stornoway	0754	4.3m	2000	4.8m
Portland	0800	1.8m	2016	2.0m
Whitby	0449	5.4m	1719	5.2m
Wick	0001	3.4m	1234	3.1m
Workington	0015	8.0m	1236	7.7m

Sun & Moon

Sun rises 0522

Sun sets 2050

Moon rises 2135

Moon sets 0714

Last Quarter 6 Aug

Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2128 to 0535
Birm'ham	2101 to 0527
Brighton	2048 to 0527
Bristol	2100 to 0535
Carlisle	2116 to 0520
Cork	2125 to 0556
Dublin	2123 to 0541
Glasgow	2127 to 0522
Harlech	2112 to 0535
Inverness	2134 to 0512
London	2050 to 0524
M'chester	2106 to 0525
Newcastle	2112 to 0515
Norwich	2049 to 0514
Penzance	2107 to 0551

Weatherwatch

Weather happens in the boundary layer, the atmosphere from ground level to a few thousand metres, but this can be difficult to study in detail: weather stations are too low, and aircraft are expensive. Instrumented weather balloons are the traditional solution, but these are at the mercy of the wind and use irreplaceable helium.

Drones offer an alternative and the US company Meteomatics has taken the idea further with Meteobase, a base station on the ground with a drone that can be launched and recovered automatically. It carries out a pre-programmed flight, gathering data at different altitudes, then returns to recharge and download data.

The base is highly weather resistant and keeps the drone at a comfortable temperature. It can send out one data-gathering mission a day, or multiple flights to monitor fog, icing, an advancing weather front, or other fast-changing conditions.

Weather balloons have been in regular use since the 1930s. They have become part of popular culture, partly because they sometimes get mistaken for UFOs. Future flying saucer spotters may be equally well entertained by weather drones. **David Hambling**

Around the world

Algers	35	Lisbon	29
Ams'dam	23	Madrid	38
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Auckland	15	Melb'rne	13
B Aires	20	Mexico C	25
Bangkok	32	Miami	35
Barcelona	31	Milan	39
Basra	48	Mombasa	30
Beijing	33	Moscow	25
Berlin	30	Mumbai	28
Bermuda	30	N Orleans	33
Brussels	27	Nairobi	24
Budapest	38	New Delhi	33
C'hagen	22	New York	28
Cairo	38	Oslo	23
Cape Town	23	Paris	30
Chicago	26	Perth	21
Corfu	35	Prague	36
Dakar	32	Reykjavik	16
Dhaka	31	Rio de J	24
Dublin	19	Rome	35
Florence	40	Shanghai	37
Gibraltar	28	Singapore	32
H Kong	29	Stockh'm	22
Harare	23	Strasb'g	31
Helsinki	25	Sydney	17
Istanbul	29	Tel Aviv	33
Jo'burg	17	Tenerife	28
K Lumpur	32	Tokyo	34
K'mandu	28	Toronto	28
Kabul	32	Vancouv'r	24
Kingston	33	Vienna	38
Kolkata	30	Warsaw	36
L Angeles	33	Wash'ton	32
Lagos	29	Well'ton	14
Lima	25	Zurich	31

Football**Premier League to share an extra £1.5bn with EFL**

Page 41 →

Racing**Ryan Moore and Diamond Necklace in sparkling form**

Page 39 →

**Sport****Cycling****Relatable Vollering out to prove her elite ability all over again**

The Dutch rider aiming for a second Tour de France Femmes title wants to bring more female fans to cycling

Jeremy Whittle
Lausanne

French pulses were set racing by Pauline-Ferrand Prévot's win in the 2025 Tour de France Femmes, but the pragmatic choice of favourite for this year's race, which begins in Lausanne tomorrow, is Demi Vollering.

The 29-year-old Dutch rider, leader of the FDJ United-Suez team and the first €1m athlete in women's racing, combines outstanding results - this year she completed a grand slam of all three of Europe's Grand Tours - with an outspoken personality.

Vollering's heart-on-her-sleeve persona has won her fans across the world. She posts pictures of herself riding with her dog in a rucksack and tackles the issues of women's mental health, athlete wellbeing and eating disorders, without missing a beat.

Vollering won the Femmes in 2023, but in 2024 lost to Kasia Niewiadoma by just four seconds, after a nail-biting final stage to Alpe d'Huez. Second again last year, she suffered the indignity of suggestions from her domestic media that she might have beaten the French rider if she'd lost more weight. Before this year's race she revisited the incident.

"I knew this question was coming," she says, recalling the final press conference. "I was like, 'OK, I need to be very careful with my words now.' I knew if I said something, maybe they'd write

it down out of context or 'hear' it differently than I meant it.

"I was super aware of the words I was choosing. But I was not happy about a lot of articles, or some subtitles, that were used, just for clicks. It was also difficult because, of course, I never wanted to undermine Pauline's performance."

A few days after the race ended she posted online: "Young girls are watching us. They notice what we say - and what we don't. What we show. What gets celebrated as 'the way' to succeed. We, as high-performance athletes, teams, and a sport, have a responsibility."

Looking back now, she acknowledges that, in her native Netherlands, she is sometimes seen as "too much".

"There are always people who are not positive about what you say or find it too much, especially in cycling, since it's a bit of an old-school sport," she says. "I'm emotional, I have a lot of stories



Vollering says she is 'emotional' and a 'different personality'

◀ Vollering tackles issues such as mental health and eating disorders
JULIEN DE ROSA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

to tell. I'm just a different type, different personality, I think."

Vollering comes to this year's Tour fresh and rested after a change of schedule. She did not race in the Tour of Switzerland or in her national championships.

Her team manager, Stephen Delcourt, takes up the story. "Last year she was sick after the Tour de Suisse and crashed at the nationals," he says. "We did a three-week training camp in Tignes, with a fresh mind and fresh body, and she can really focus on the main goal."

Ferrand-Prévot's victory in 2025 was founded on an explosive ascent of the Col de la Madeleine in the Alps. This year's key mountain stage will come three days before the finish with a first-ever visit by the Tour de France Femmes to Mont Ventoux. It's a climb that Vollering knows well from holidays as a teenager.

"We all drove down there in a van and went camping," she says. "It was the first time I saw real mountains and the first time I rode up a real mountain. I was just so impressed. I really enjoyed riding up there."

"It was hard, but I was looking around the whole time and really pushing myself. I passed some men and I was super proud to see that they were really suffering and that I was passing them."

Vollering said Ventoux was where she discovered her climbing skills. "That's where I really found out I was a pretty good climber because against all the other girls I trained with, I was always the first at the top. And the coaches who came with us - I left them all behind too. I could see that my level was pretty good."

"Mentally too, I was able to suffer, maybe more than average people on that mountain. I saw that riding uphill was my strength and suited me as the type of athlete I am. The Ventoux inspired me a lot."

She is excited by the prospect of the Tour de France Femmes going to Britain in a year's time. "I follow some British football teams and they're amazing. They are really inspiring people to watch. So, it's cool to see [the Tour coming to Britain]."

Despite the rapid growth of women's sport she says cycling remains male dominated. "I think probably it's still mostly men who follow our sport, but I feel like it's changing slowly, especially with women's sport growing more. You see more women turning up at our races, more children, more families who come to watch and to support. So, for me, this is a really positive change."

Golf AIG Women's Open**Hull defends £100,000 scratchcard prank after solid start**

Ewan Murray
Royal Lytham & St Annes

Charley Hull has delivered an emphatic, unapologetic response towards those who criticised a prank on the eve of the Women's Open.

Hull used pre-tournament media duties to reveal she bought fake scratchcards in a Blackpool joke shop, before using one to trick her caddie, Adam Woodward, into believing he had won £100,000. Hull filmed Woodward's initially euphoric and subsequently despondent reaction to the incident.

While some onlookers saw the funny side of the stunt, Hull also drew harsh words for her treatment of Woodward. Many perceived it as unduly cruel. The caddie has worked for Hull for the vast majority of her professional career. Hull's carefree, playful nature is well known within her sport.

In this instance, Hull cares little about splitting opinion. "People that have complaints about it, I would say loosen up," Hull said after a two-under-par 69 to start her challenge at Royal Lytham & St Annes. "I don't have my social media on my phone on tournament weeks. I delete it and when I go home I'll add it again. I don't really like people seeing me and tagging me and stuff. I like to keep in the present moment. But I think people need to lighten up if they're taking that too seriously because it was pretty funny."

Hull added she would "100%" participate in a similar scenario again. "He thought it was funny after, he is

not uptight," she said of Woodward. "It's a joke. If people don't like it they can lump it, do you know what I mean?"

"I felt bad for Adam but at the end of the day I have just got to have a good week. At the end of the week I'll buy him 100 scratchcards." A peculiar business.

Hull trails the early leader, Atthaya "Jeeno" Thitikul, by five shots. The Thai player has been astonishingly consistent in majors - posting 11 top-10 finishes since 2021 - but is yet to win. Perhaps Lytham will be key - Thitikul won top amateur honours as a 15-year-old when the Women's Open was staged here in 2018. Thitikul's close shaves on the biggest stage are worthy of comparisons with Hull. Her 64 was the lowest score in a Lytham Women's Open.

Ryu Hae-ran's ambition is not only to extinguish the hopes of her rivals but secure a little piece of history. Until Thitikul's surge, Ryu topped the leaderboard. Victories at this year's PGA and Evian Championships mean she is in the incredible position of seeking a third major win in a row. Only four female golfers have achieved the feat yet Ryu's position is unique. She has not played in any other tournaments outside the majors in question.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the South Korean responded with a firm no when asked whether she has contemplated three from three. Fifty-four holes in a links environment provide the epitome of a long way to go. Still, her five-under-par 66 - which included half a dozen birdies and an outward half of 31 - felt significant. Shiho Kuwaki later matched Ryu's first-round total.

Lottie Woad's 69 enhanced hopes of a home winner, eight years after England's Georgia Hall prevailed at Lytham. Woad has quietly risen to fifth in the world rankings, little over a year since she turned professional. Her round owed much to avoiding every one of Lytham's 174, highly penal bunkers.

Woad's approach is an aggressive one. "I think I hit the most drivers out of anyone in my group," she said. "It's one of my strengths, so I didn't see the point in laying back."



▲ Charley Hull hit a two-under-par 69 in the first round of the Women's Open
PETER BYRNE/PA

Fleming to focus on developing talent as Test coach but Root asked to lead England again

Simon Burnton

Stephen Fleming has been confirmed as the new coach of the England men's Test team, with Joe Root returning for a second spell as captain.

Marcus Trescothick will take interim charge for the three-game series against Pakistan that starts at Headingley in three weeks, with Fleming due to arrive "later this summer" and assume the reins for this winter's trip to South Africa.

Following what the England and Wales Cricket Board described as "a rigorous process, which involved numerous high-quality candidates", Fleming emerged as a unanimous choice. Rob Key, the managing director of men's cricket, who led the recruitment process, said England were "very fortunate that someone

of his calibre is willing to take on the challenge", adding: "I believe he is the best person to guide a team stacked full of potential and turn that talent into a world-class outfit that can not only achieve success but sustain it."

Fleming, who has signed a four-year contract to September 2030, replaces his friend and former international teammate Brendon McCullum, who was sacked earlier this month after England's poor performance in the Ashes was followed by a series defeat at home to New Zealand.

The pair will work alongside each other, with McCullum remaining in charge of the white-ball sides, and the decision to appoint Root as captain allows McCullum's burgeoning partnership with Harry Brook, who captains England in limited-overs cricket, to continue.

Fleming captained New Zealand

in 80 Tests, more than any other player from that nation, winning 28 and losing 27. Root has already captained England in 65, the most of any Englishman, winning 27 and losing 27.

The 35-year-old stood down from the role in 2022 saying that "it's hit home how much of a toll it has taken on me and the impact it has had on me away from the game", but enjoyed returning for one of the three Tests against New Zealand and has now agreed to resume the burden on a permanent basis.

"It is a great honour and privilege to be asked to be Test captain again," Root said. "The Test captaincy is a difficult but hugely rewarding job and, after enjoying a brief taste of it again working with Baz McCullum last month, I am excited to lead this next generation of players forward."

"The opportunity to do that



▲ Joe Root led England out on 65 occasions in his first spell as captain

alongside Stephen is also a huge motivator. He has proved over a long period of time that he is an exceptional leader with a great knowledge of the game, and I am looking forward to working with him and helping to build a winning environment."

The ECB described Fleming, 53, as "one of the most highly regarded coaches in world cricket" but his

experience has largely been in the white-ball game, with the Indian Premier League side Chennai Super Kings and its subsidiaries.

"It's one of the most prestigious coaching positions in world cricket and I am honoured to be appointed," Fleming said. "I am looking forward to working with the players and bedding in the gains made by Brendon McCullum and Ben Stokes. Of course, the ambition is always to win now. But equally, it's about ensuring the team is well placed for the medium and long-term future. There is a lot of young talent in and around the team and our aim is to help them fulfil their potential as world-class cricketers."

"I'm particularly looking forward to working with Joe Root as captain. There is still plenty more to come from him, and I'm excited to support him so he can enjoy and thrive in the role in what is a different context to his first stint. I'm also excited to work with Harry Brook. The best players are never finished products, and helping Harry continue to develop his extraordinary talent and his leadership will be an important part of this journey."

'He'll bring common sense and calmness to the whole set-up'

New Test coach has built a reputation for being a composed reader of people since his time as a player

Simon Burnton

With two games of the 2005 season remaining Nottinghamshire, under the captaincy of Stephen Fleming, were sitting precariously at the top of the County Championship, still needing to visit their two main rivals. First up was Kent: Notts were 397 for five after the first day, but rain washed out most of the second and at the end of the third Kent were only five down. A draw looked inevitable and with a Shane Warne-inspired Hampshire - Notts' final opponents - on their way to victory at Glamorgan the title chase seemed to be turning. But Fleming had other plans.

"He called a meeting of the senior players on the fourth morning to say he had an idea," says Darren Bicknell, his Notts teammate. "If Kent didn't win the game against us, they were dead, they'd have no way to win the title, so he recognised that he had them over a barrel a little bit." Fleming offered Kent the chance to chase 420 in 70 overs, an unlikely target - but also the best they were going to get. "To take a calculated gamble in that game was a stroke of genius,"

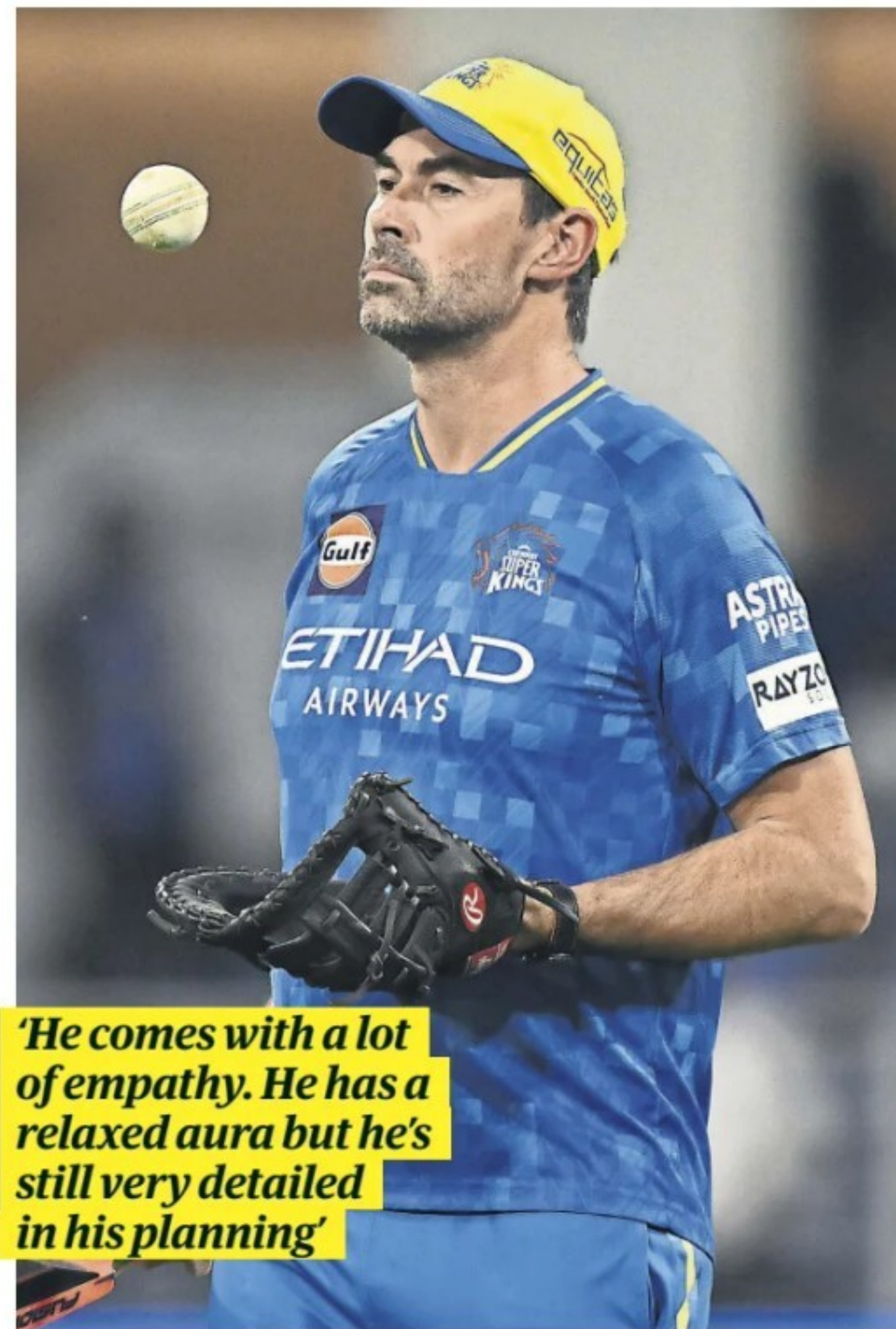
Bicknell says. "Some of the senior players were a bit anxious, thinking we didn't need to take any risks because the draw was still a good result. But people went with him."

On the final day Kent duly declared their first innings; Notts motored at seven an over until the agreed total was reached then declared also; then Kent, with no choice but to attack, were bowled out for 205. Notts won the title with a game to spare.

England's interim captain when New Zealand played them the previous year - Marcus Trescothick, now back in charge of England's Test side in an interim role - had admitted his opposite number was "regarded as the best in the world", and here was more proof. Kent's first man out in that forlorn run chase? Rob Key, the man who has just appointed him England coach.

"He was just very calm all the time, very unruffled," Bicknell says of Fleming. "He worked out the game really well, worked out people very well, but overall he was just calm, even in the hottest of moments. Everyone trusted him to be on everything. I think in moments when things weren't going well, there was a reflection from him that everything was still all right: just be patient, stay calm, and it will come right as long as we're doing the right things. He was just a really good man and the sort of person you felt like you wanted to play for. I think he'll be very good and he'll bring a sense of common sense and calmness to the whole England set-up."

Fleming has not always been



'He comes with a lot of empathy. He has a relaxed aura but he's still very detailed in his planning'

calm in hot moments. There is another widely quoted example of his cricketing cunning: in the fifth of six ODIs in South Africa in 2004 the hosts, needing to win to keep the series alive, came out to chase an achievable, rain-affected target of 178 in 29 overs. As their captain, Graeme Smith, approached the crease Fleming unleashed a stream of invective.

Just three days earlier Smith had described Fleming "changing

his game plan against me in every match so far ... I'm sure he's just trying to get into my mind". But as this normally gentle man showered him in abuse, that was all forgotten. Smith responded in kind and then, distracted, scored 15 off 33; New Zealand won by two runs. "Graeme is emotional. That was one chink we thought we might explore and he took the bait," Fleming later said. "It was never personal. I made it personal in one game to get the edge."

◀ Former teammates say Stephen Fleming is an outstanding leader
PRAKASH SINGH/GETTY IMAGES

Those who have worked with Fleming describe an empathetic man, a skilled reader of people - skills he can use to build you up, but perhaps also to destroy you. "He was quite simply an outstanding leader of men," says David Alleyne, another member of that Nottinghamshire side. "He had a great way of communicating, and finding the right time and the right space to really empower you as an individual, and get you to think about your game in a way that was going to help the team. I found him quite remarkable in that sense. He was very calm, very calculated."

Praise for Fleming has not quite been universal, and most notably Hemang Badani, currently head coach of Delhi Capitals and Southern Brave, said the success he achieved at Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League - where he reached 10 finals and won five titles - was all down to his captain, MS Dhoni. "He's never won anywhere outside the IPL," Badani said in 2024. "If someone says he's a great coach, I wouldn't agree. Dhoni is the winner."

Chris Jordan, having played under Fleming at CSK and Southern Brave, disagrees. "He comes with a lot of empathy. He has a very relaxed aura about him but he's still very, very detailed in his planning and his messaging. And he's very, very good at creating role clarity within a team," Jordan says.

Jordan is one of just a handful of people to have played under Fleming and alongside Joe Root, who has returned as England captain. "I definitely think Joe and Flem as a combination will be quite excellent, and I actually think Flem could take Joe Root's captaincy to the next level," Jordan says. "He really has that knack of bringing out the best in players and making you really believe in yourself. He's just a top human being."

▼ *Emily Campbell would not be drawn on a possible appearance at LA 2028*

TOM JENKINS/THE GUARDIAN



Commonwealth Games

Campbell sends crowd wild with record display

Weightlifter dominates the women's +86kg category and then reveals her imminent appearance on MasterChef

Sean Ingle
SEC Armadillo

By the time Emily Campbell stepped on to the platform for a final time yesterday, the women's +86kg weightlifting final had all the fervour of a revivalist meeting.

Everyone was cheering. There were loud shouts and exhortations. People who didn't know a snatch from a clean and jerk two hours before had become instant converts. It was the Campbell Effect in action again. But the double Olympic medallist wasn't finished there.

"Emily is not satisfied with a gold medal," said the announcer. "She's not satisfied with a CWG [Commonwealth Games] record. She wants more!" The clean and jerk bar had been set to 160kg. But the army volunteers whose job it is to add more weights had barely moved, when the announcer piped up again. "Stop the clock! 163kg on the bar please loaders. Emily wants a Commonwealth record!"

Then the 32-year-old with three lions on her England shirt, and six lions woven into her dyed-red hair, went out and got it. One striking display of force and timing got the bar on her shoulders. Another got it over the head. Then the SEC erupted in a sea of love and appreciation.

Campbell responded by blowing kisses to her adoring fans. "I couldn't have asked them to be any louder," she said. "I couldn't really hear myself think."

But how she deserved it after lifting 115kg in the snatch and 163kg in the clean and jerk for a combined score of 278kg. That, incredibly, was 25kg clear of her nearest rival.

Racism claim rejected

Commonwealth Sport chiefs have dismissed Idi Amin's grandson's claims of corruption and racism after he was disqualified for a headbutt against England's Damar Thomas. Aziz Abdul, the grandson of Uganda's late dictator, had raged at the referee's decision, alleging he had been discriminated against because of his nationality. But Dr Donald Rukare, the president of Commonwealth Sport, who is also from Uganda rejected the claims. "As far as we're concerned it was a fair playing field," he said. **Sean Ingle**

As people waved St George flags and punched the air it was hard to imagine how she could be any more popular, but then she told us she would be appearing on Celebrity MasterChef next month.

"It was a really fun experience," she said. "It was really nice for me to do something without being Emily the weightlifter. Food is something I've always been massively passionate about."

"MasterChef was definitely more nerve-racking than this, absolutely. MasterChef was very tough. It was a very tough competition, but I enjoyed it thoroughly. My signature dish is Caribbean and that's all I'm going to give you."

The only moment that gave us pause afterwards came when Campbell intimated she wasn't entirely sure whether she would go for a hat-trick of Olympic medals at the LA Games in 2028.

"Do you want me to be dead honest with you?" she said. "It hurts everywhere. Everywhere. Your knees, your shoulders, your back, everywhere. We're lifting serious weight and it is hard and that's why you have to be really sensible."

"So I've got some thinking to do. We're going to go back with the team. We're going to strategise. LA, we would like to go, but we've got to look at the practicalities. If they work, you will see me start qualification at the end of the year. But for now, we enjoy what just happened."

As she spoke, the 18-year-old Etta Mae Love of Canada, who won bronze, was talking about how Britain's finest lifter had been an inspiration when she first started.

That made Campbell smile, even if it also made her feel a little strange. "It is lovely now that I'm at a stage where I've become so old that I'm sharing the stage with people that were inspired by me," she said. "But it's always very surreal when people go - you're a role model - because you never set out to do that."

"You just set out to do the thing that you love and you do it with grace. But if I can get someone to do something they're passionate about, then I've done more than my job."

And this, certainly, was another job impeccably done.

Racing

Arc on horizon as Diamond Necklace dares to dazzle again

Greg Wood
Goodwood

The high summer sun was still beating down on Glorious Goodwood yesterday, but thoughts were already beginning to turn towards the autumn's showpiece events in France and the US after Diamond Necklace extended her unbeaten record to six races with an effortless success in the Nassau Stakes.

Diamond Necklace had just a nose to spare at the end of the Prix de Diane (French Oaks) at Chantilly in June, but her first start since proved much more straightforward as Ryan Moore cruised past Friendly Soul, the second favourite, inside the final quarter-mile on the way to a two-and-three-quarter length victory.

Thursday's success was the fourth Group One win of Diamond Necklace's career and if she is kept to racing against her own sex, there may not be a filly or mare in Europe to touch her at 10 furlongs.

The bookmakers, though, also now price her as the 10-1 third-favourite for the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe at Longchamp in October, and while Diamond Necklace's stamina for the 12-furlong trip has yet to be tested, female runners have won nine of the past 15 runnings of Europe's showpiece middle-distance event.

"Diamond Necklace is a lovely filly who has danced every dance," Aidan O'Brien, her trainer, said. "She has options now, whether she stays at a mile-and-a-quarter and goes to the fillies' race in France [at Deauville

"The next run will tell us where she is going to go after"

Aidan O'Brien
Trainer



▲ Ryan Moore steers Diamond Necklace to a fourth Group One win

in August], or to Leopardstown [in September] or an Arc trial.

"It is possible [the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe]. I don't know how far we ask her to go, but the next run will tell us where she is going to go after that."

The only names ahead of Diamond Necklace in the Arc betting are Daryz, last year's winner, and O'Brien's best three-year-old colt, Constitution River, already the winner of the French Derby and the Eclipse Stakes this year.

"Constitution River's the boss, really," O'Brien said.

"Everyone will fall into line. He'll get all the options and at the moment, he's going to York [for next month's International Stakes]."

The much-respected *Timeform* operation floated the possibility that O'Brien's string might be struggling for form a few days ago, but this was a second Group One for the trainer from the three available at Glorious Goodwood, and completed a double on the day after Man's Best Friend ran away with the Group Two Richmond Stakes earlier on the card.

Thursday's race was an unusually swift step up in class for Man's Best Friend, who registered the first win of his career, in a maiden event, just eight days earlier.

"He is a baby of a horse," O'Brien said. "We thought bringing him here today was going to do him good, win, lose or draw."

"All options are open. He looks a Middle Park type of horse or a Gimcrack horse. He could turn into a [seven-furlong] Dewhurst horse, who knows?"

Results

Commonwealth Games

ATHLETICS

Men's Shot Put: 1 C Enekeuchi (Ngr) 21.07; 2 T Walsh (NZ) 21.03; 3 S Lincoln (Eng) 20.99.

Women's Triple Jump: 1 T LaFond (Dom) 14.60; 2 A Smith (Jam) 14.04; 3 S Foreman (Jam) 13.96.

Women's Discus: 1 S Hall (Jam) 61.66; 2 J Tunks (Can) 60.67; 3 Seema (Ind) 58.65.

Women's 5000m: 1 R Davies (Aus) 14:44.53; 2 J Hull (Aus) 14:45.01; 3 M Keith (Sco) 14:49.10.

Women's 100m Hurdles: 1 D Charlton (Bah) 12.33; 2 M Simmonds (Jam) 12.41; 3 Amusan (Ngr) 12.60.

PARA ATHLETICS

Women's 100m T47: 1 S Haase (Can) 12.23; 2 C Dunbar (Can) 12.33; 3 A Grimaldi (NZ) 12.46.

Men's 100m T12: 1 Z Shaw (Eng) 10.89; 2 M Makatu (SA) 11.04; 3 G Quarcio 11.06.

TRACK CYCLING

Women's Tandem B Sprint: 1 E Foy & J Hodges (NZ); 2 J Gallagher & J Mengler-Mohr (Aus); 3 E Jordan & S Misztal (Eng).

Men's Tandem B 1000m Time Trial: 1 N Fachie & A Pope (Sco) 1:00.162; 2 J Ball & M Rotherham (Wal) 1:00.546; 3 K Perris & L Zaccaria (Aus) 1:01.873.

Women's 4000m Team Pursuit: 1 Australia 4:10.658; 2 New Zealand 4:12.775; 3 Wales 4:12.973.

Men's 4000m Team Pursuit: 1 England 3:47.092; 2 Australia 3:48.223; 3 New Zealand 3:52.310.

Women's Team Sprint: 1 Wales 46.760; 2 England 46.901; 3 Scotland 47.185.

Men's Team Sprint: 1 Australia 42.455; 2 England 43.032; 3 Trinidad & Tobago w/o.

PARA TRACK CYCLING

Women's C4-C5 4000m Individual Pursuit:

1 T Neyland (Aus) 4:46.614; 2 M Newberry (Eng) 5:05.764; 3 N Murray (NZ) 5:06.199.

WEIGHTLIFTING

Men's 110kg: 1 T Rainibogi (Fij) 378; 2 C Tchatchet II (Eng) 374; 3 X Lusignan (Can) 356.

Women's +86kg: 1 E Campbell (Eng) 278; 2 SAF Draman (Mal) 253; 3 EM Love (Can) 250.

Men's +110kg: 1 D Liti (NZ) 389; 2 L Singh (Ind) 388; 3 A Griffiths (Eng) 356.

Football

EUROPA LEAGUE

Second qualifying rd: second leg Anderlecht 3 Hammarby 1 (agg 4-2); Benfica 5 St Gallen 0 (agg 6-2); CSKA Sofia 0 Qarabag 0 (agg 0-0; CSKA 5-4 on pens); Ferencváros 2 Twente 2 (agg 4-3); Hradec Kralove 3 Tromsø 1 (agg 4-1); M Tel Aviv 1 Sheriff 0 (agg 6-0); Midtjylland 0 Besiktas 2 (agg 0-3); Pafos 4 Hajduk 0 (agg 4-2); PAOK 2 D Kyiv 0 (agg 5-2).

CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Second qualifying round: second leg

Hibernian (3) 4 **Malisheva** (0) 1
Elding, Passlack 15 Bajraktari 84
Lowe 35, Boyle 57 (agg 4-3)

HB Torshavn

(0) 0 **Motherwell** (2) 3
Fadinger 25pen
Charles-Cook 36, Williams 50
(agg 0-5)

Ajax 4 Vojvodina 1 (agg 8-2); Atlétic Club d'Escaldes 0 Vaduz 2 (agg 0-6); Auda 4 FCSB 1 (agg 7-3); Austria Vienna 3 Liepaja 1 (agg 5-1); Balıkanlı 3 Bohemians 2 (agg 4-4; Bohemians won 5-4 on pens); Beitar Jerusalem 2 AEK Larnaca 3 (agg 3-3; Beitar won 4-3 on pens); Braga 1 Zeleznicar Pancevo 1; Brann 3 Uni Cluj 1 (agg 5-3); CFR Cluj 3 Alashkert 0 (agg 4-1); Coleraine 0 HJK 3 (agg 0-8); Derry City 0 Rijeka 1 (agg 0-2); Dinamo Minsk 0 Neftchi 1 (agg 4-3); Dinamo City 3 Aluminij 0 (agg 4-1); GKS Katowice 3 Zilina 1 (agg 4-3); Gent 1 LNZ Cherkasy 1 (agg 0-0); Gyori ETO 1 Atert Bissen 1 (agg 7-3); Ilves 2 Stjarnan 1 (agg 2-2; Ilves won 5-4 on pens); Inter Turku 2 Istanbul Basaksehir 0 (agg 3-1); Jablonec 2 Varazdin 0 (agg 4-3); Koper 1 NSÍ 1 (agg 2-2); Levadia 1 IFK Göteborg 3 (agg 3-4); Ludogorets 2 Hapoel Tel Aviv 2 (agg 2-4); Noah 2 Zimbru 1 (agg 3-2); Nomme Kalju 2 Shelbourne 1 (agg 4-6); Nordsjælland 6 GAIS 0 (agg 6-1); Panathinaikos 2 Paks 2 (agg 4-3); Petrocub 3 Borac Banja Luka 3 (agg 3-6); Pyunik 0 Debrecen 0 (agg 0-1); Shkendija 3 Bravo 1 (agg 4-3); Sion 4 BATE 0 (agg 5-1); Sutjeska 1 Vitebsk 2 (agg 1-5); The New Saints 1 Flora Tallinn 0 (agg 1-1; Flora won 4-2 on pens); Tobol 1 Panevezys 1 (agg 2-2; Tobol won 3-2 on pens); UNA Strassen 0 Partizan 1 (agg 0-5); Valletta 0 Rakow Czestochowa 4 (agg 1-7); Velez 0 DAC 1904 3 (agg 0-4); Vestri 1 RFS 1 (agg 2-5); Zalgiris 7 Dinamo Tbilisi 2 (agg 7-5); Zira 1 Paide 1 (agg 1-2); Zrinjski 2 Valur 2 (agg 2-3).

Cricket

METRO BANK ONE DAY CUP MEN

Preston Lancashire 220 (AR Shetty 53). Nottinghamshire 189 (K Verreynne 61). JM Blatherwick 4-30). Lancashire beat Nottinghamshire by 31 runs.

THE HUNDRED MEN

Utilita Bowl Southern Brave 128-8. Birmingham Phoenix 116-9. Southern Brave won by 12 runs.

THE HUNDRED WOMEN

Utilita Bowl Southern Brave 140-3. Birmingham Phoenix 116-5 (DST Perrin 52). Southern Brave won by 24 runs.

Rugby league

BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE

Huddersfield 22 Hull FC 16

Greg Wood's racing tips

Goodwood 1.50 Annabel's Ghost 2.25 Talk Of New York 3.00 Godwinson (nap) 3.35 Jm Jungle (nb) 4.10 Galen 4.45 Dubai Champion 5.20 Into The Light 5.55 Silver Lake **Wolverhampton** 2.00 Rajiba 2.35 Gunfighter 3.10 Carnival Of Light 3.45 Highland Shah 4.20 Roc De Fer 4.55 American Style 5.25 Poetic Jack **Newcastle** 2.10 Balqaa 2.45 Royal Strike 3.20 Ned Brox 3.55 Nana's Boy George 4.30 Reginald Charles 5.05 Travis 5.40 Uncle Sam **Bath** 5.35 Belle Of Kt 6.08 Havana Gift 6.43 Some Nightmare 7.18 Honky Tonk Girl 7.48 Connie's Rose 8.18 Blue Hero **Muscelburgh** 5.45 Jedhi Knight 6.15 Gerry's Darling 6.50 Aurora Valkyrie 7.25 Jer Batt 7.55 Wait For It 8.25 Gallus Norman 8.55 Golden Havana **Newmarket** 5.50 Louis The Fifth 6.25 Aleatrix 7.00 Spring Bloom 7.32 Cherry Cobbler 8.02 Sibling Rivalry 8.32 Drifts Away

Golf

WOMEN'S OPEN (Lytham St Annes, Lancashire)

Leading first-round scores (GB & Ire unless stated):

64 A Thitikul (Tha); 66 Ryu H-r (Kor); 5 Kuwaki (Jpn). 67 C Boutier (Fr); Y Noh (US). 68 C Iwai (Jpn); C Wannasaen (Tha). 69 C Hull; R Takeda (Jpn); L Wood; P Martin (Sp); S Tan (Sin); D Dagar (Ind); M Saigo (Jpn); L Coughlin (US); A Buhai (SA). 70 A Hewson; A Försterling (Ger); Im J-h (Kor); J Kupcho (US); A Yubol (Tha); Y Wilson (US); C Porter (Aus); Joo S-b (Kor); Yang Y-s (Kor). 71 Hsu W-l (Tai); M Rhodes; L Grant (Swe); A Lee (US); Kang M-j (Kor); R Choi (Aus); H Green (Aus); L Ko (NZ); L Harm (Ger); N Komulainen (Fin); A Fuller.

Fixtures

Football (7.45pm unless stated)

William Hill Scottish Premiership

Dundee Utd v Rangers (8pm)

JD Cymru Premier

Barry Town v Cambrian Utd; Briton Ferry v Ammanford;

Colwyn Bay v Trefelin; Llandudno v Flint Town

Cricket (11am unless stated)

Women's T20 International

Sri Lanka v Pakistan; Hambantota (5.30am).

Metro Bank One Day Cup Men

Group A Gloucestershire v Surrey, Bristol (2pm); Kent v

Somerset, Canterbury; Northamptonshire v Leicestershire,

Northampton. **Group B** Derbyshire v Glamorgan, Repton;

Essex v Hampshire, Chelmsford; Worcestershire v

Middlesex, Worcester; Yorkshire v Durham, York.

The Hundred Men

Manchester v Trent Rockets, Emirates Old Trafford (6.30pm).

The Hundred Women

Manchester v Trent Rockets, Emirates Old Trafford (3pm).

Rugby league (8pm unless stated)

Betfred Super League

Hull KR v Bradford; Leeds v Toulouse; Leigh v Wigan

▼ Gianni Infantino (left) and Donald Trump collaborated on delivering the 2026 World Cup in the US

RICHARD SELLERS/APL/SPORTSPHOTO

Fifa's sale of the century

Kushners and Trump at the centre of a tangled web

Joshua Kushner is now the kingpin in driving the sale of the World Cup to investors and family ties are tight around the project, writes **Rob Draper**

It isn't just football fans and Uefa executives who want to give Gianni Infantino the red card for his plan to sell off 20% of the World Cup to a privately backed commercial enterprise. The Fifa president is also in the crosshairs of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee in Washington and ranking Democrat member Jamie Raskin. The reason? Infantino's plan, which is backed by Joshua Kushner's investment fund, has, for some observers, president Trump's sticky fingers all over it.

Raskin told Politico that Fifa was "going directly into business with the Trump family", before making reference to the peace prize Infantino awarded the president in December and Fifa's use of office space in Trump Tower, New York. "Apparently the fake Peace Prize and giant lease with Trump Tower

were not enough - now Infantino performs a kickback hat-trick by pursuing a multibillion-dollar deal with Jared Kushner's brother to sell ownership stakes in the World Cup to private investors."

As is often the case with Trump, the Kushner family is at the centre of any tangled web he weaves. Jared and Joshua's father, Charles Kushner, convicted of tax evasion, witness tampering, illegal campaign contributions and sentenced to two years in prison, is Trump's ambassador to France though he speaks no French. He was pardoned by Trump in 2020.

Jared, married to Trump's daughter Ivanka, is a Special Envoy for Peace and helped negotiate the Islamabad Memorandum ceasefire with Iran, which has now seemingly collapsed. He was also the man charged with fulfilling Trump's pledge of bringing the Russia-Ukraine war to an end within 24 hours of him assuming the presidency.

But at the heart of this and once again keeping influence very much within the family is Jared's younger brother, Joshua, 41, who has established various private investment funds including Thrive

Some critics say even a 20% stake will be controlling if Infantino remains in charge of Fifa



Jared Kushner is a close ally of president Trump

Eternal, who will be lead investor in Fifa Forward Enterprise, the commercial spin-off Infantino is proposing to sell shares in.

With Jared having divested his shares in Thrive Capital (the parent company of Thrive Eternal) in 2017 when taking on a role in Trump's first administration, the familial ties seem especially tight around this project, as intimated by Raskin, who has already summoned Infantino to attend the House judiciary committee. He has also requested Fifa documents related to any gifts and benefits provided to Trump and details of the visitor logs for Fifa's office space in Trump Tower.

Given Trump's boasting that his direct line to Infantino persuaded Fifa to suspend the USA's Folarin Balogun's red card for the World Cup last-16 game against Belgium - the USA lost 4-1 - it is an unfortunate look for Infantino that the extended Trump family, through marriage, will be leading the sale of the century, the handing over of substantial control of the World Cup. Some critics say even a 20% minority stake will in effect be a controlling stake if Infantino remains in charge without

accountability. Joshua, though, is only following in the footsteps of his older brother Jared in his incredible capacity for dealmaking.

Six months after the end of the first Trump presidency and after having being involved in US negotiations with Saudi Arabia during Trump's first term, Jared managed to secure £2bn worth of funding for his own investment vehicle, Affinity Fund Management, from the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF), which is chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto ruler of the kingdom. The New York Times reported that PIF advisers raised objections about the deal reeling to "the inexperience of the Affinity Fund management" and that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia seemed to bear "the bulk of the investment and risk" but the PIF board, chaired by the crown prince, overruled those warnings to approve the money.

Coincidentally, Saudi Arabia will be hosting the 2034 World Cup in a bid driven by Prince Mohammed. The PIF, also owner of Newcastle United and the oil company Aramco, is Fifa's newest World Cup sponsor, with deals reportedly worth around \$100m a year.

Kushner has always defended the tie-up with the PIF, challenging critics to "point to a single decision we made that wasn't in the interest of America". Prince Mohammed was implicated in the murder of US citizen Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul in 2018, with the United Nations concluding that the state of Saudi Arabia was responsible while a US intelligence report, that was released by the former president Joe Biden, concluded that Prince Mohammed "approved an operation ... to capture or kill" the Saudi dissident. The Saudi government rejected both reports, calling them "inaccurate".

US-Saudi relationships have been much warmer in both Trump's terms compared with the Biden interim and last week the US agreed a landmark deal to cooperate with Saudi Arabia to develop civilian nuclear power, while the two nations coordinated airstrikes on Iran-backed militias in Iraq this week.

However, it is a different Kushner brother from an unrelated investment fund who is now the kingpin in driving the sale of the World Cup to investors.

It is, however, reported by Politico that Joshua will be approaching sovereign wealth funds "to build a globally diversified investment base". Perhaps his brother Jared will be able to help with some contact numbers to get the ball rolling?

Identity of investors not revealed in Fifa prospectus

a plan to "expand and optimize media rights monetization". JP Morgan claims that Fifa is "undermonetized" but significantly makes comparisons with other sports leagues with the revenue figures based on club or franchise earnings, rather than with comparable governing bodies.

Fifa's stated annual revenue of \$3.6bn therefore compares unfavourably with the NFL's compared

revenue of \$21.2bn, Major League Baseball's \$13.1bn and the NBA's \$12.5bn.

The document was sent to all 211 member associations on Wednesday night and immediately provoked a strong reaction.

One senior figure queried why Fifa, which has cash reserves of around \$4bn and accumulated revenues of \$15bn over the current four-year

cycle, would need to take on debt. Another highlighted the odd comparison of a world governing body with private, member-run leagues, while JP Morgan's proposed timeline for completing the deal was also questioned.

According to the document "Investors will be given access to a term sheet and select materials" in August before a vote of Fifa

members has taken place. Significantly there is little mention of the investor group elsewhere in the prospectus, with no reference to its identity, projected returns or exit terms.

There is one more major omission in the document, as there is not a single mention of women's football anywhere across the 25 pages.

Fifa was approached for comment.

Premier League agrees proposal to share an extra £1.5bn with EFL clubs

Paul MacInnes

The Premier League has agreed on a proposal to reset financial distribution within English football's top four divisions, one that would lead to an extra £1.5bn being shared across the pyramid over the next decade.

Clubs voted unanimously to support the "new deal for football" at a meeting yesterday, after discussions with the EFL. The offer will now be presented to the EFL's board for consideration.

According to details originally published by Sky News, the Premier League's offer would run for 10 years and result in an additional £1.5bn being shared with EFL clubs on top of the £1.6bn currently distributed to

clubs and communities every three years. Some of the money would be put into discrete funds - a "lifeboat" fund for clubs in immediate crisis and one that is directed exclusively at infrastructure.

To cover the extra costs, Premier League clubs have reportedly agreed to raise the transfer levy applied to all top-flight deals from 4% to 6%. It was reported this week that Manchester City were initially opposed to increasing the levy.

The Premier League said in a statement that its clubs had "unanimously voted to approve a funded proposal for a new strategic partnership with the EFL". It said it would now "look forward to continuing discussions with the EFL on progressing this proposal" and remain "committed to finding a football-led solution".

10-game bans for bigotry

Players found guilty of discrimination face serving at least 10-game bans under enhanced FA rules. In past seasons, suspensions of between six and 12 games have been recommended for aggravated breaches - any misconduct including an express or implied reference to ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion, sex, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation or disability. The rules also apply to managers and other officials. Sanctions of more than 10 matches can be imposed if significant aggravating factors are present. **PA Media**



Premier League clubs have voted unanimously for 'new deal for football'

The EFL has yet to officially receive the offer but acknowledged "constructive" discussions with the Premier League and said its board would "review the full detail of the proposal, including its potential benefits, implications and alignment with the long-term interests of our 72 clubs, ahead of further dialogue with the Premier League".

This is the first time that Premier League clubs have officially agreed a proposal that could be put to the EFL since they were first asked to give more money to the

rest of the pyramid five years ago. The Covid pandemic had revealed the precarious nature of finances at many EFL clubs and in 2022 the then sports minister, Nigel Huddleston, said the British public were already "out of patience" over a failure to reach an improved settlement.

The belief that the Premier League's riches could be shared more effectively across the game helped lead in part to the creation of the Independent Football Regulator, which came into being last year. The regulator has played no direct part in the negotiations, but has a "back-stop" power to force a settlement if none is agreed.

While there is cautious optimism that a deal can now finally be agreed, it is not a guarantee that the EFL will accept the Premier League's offer, with sources suggesting it sees the proposal as being very similar to one that was mooted in 2023 but ultimately never approved by Premier League clubs. Both sides say they remain committed to ongoing dialogue.

Scottish Premiership

McInnes's arrival at Rangers adds new twist to Old Firm tale

Having come within minutes of the title with Hearts, manager has a score to settle from last season with Celtic, writes **Ewan Murray**

Only residents of cloud cuckoo land can hold the firm belief that Scottish football will emerge promptly from a summer of discontent. The onset of a new domestic season, ordinarily a cause for excitement, instead gives reason to ponder the grim realities of what came before.

That it is unsurprising there has been no detailed explanation or plan from the Scottish Football Association following a lamentable World Cup does not prevent the scenario from being so deflating.

The nation's leading clubs have been moot on a big picture they wilfully ignore but that was exposed at a World Cup. The problem is that lingering and legitimate anger over Scotland's showing on the biggest stage - despite all rationale behind it - mirrors so much broader sentiment as the Premiership returns. This has scope to be a troublesome, toxic campaign.

Celtic's supporters remain irate at the custodians of their club, whom they perceive as complacent and out of touch. In Derek McInnes, Rangers have a new manager who is deeply unpopular on the other side of the city. Nobody should underestimate the lingering resentment that exists among



▲ Derek McInnes takes charge of Rangers for the first time tonight

followers of Hearts over the way the campaign of 2025-26 concluded.

The most reprehensible element of that arrived on 11 June, when the Scottish Professional Football League published the outcome of a disciplinary process into the pitch invasion that forced the ending of Celtic's title-clinching clash against the Edinburgh club.

Snuggled in alongside wrist tickles for Hamilton, Inverness and Stenhousemuir was a meagre fine for Celtic and a suspended, paltry ticket reduction. Rangers fans, who need little encouragement to rail against officialdom, were subdued until McInnes was slapped with a touchline ban for comments made against a refereeing decision.

Rangers have criticised elements of an independent report into the chaos which followed their

March Scottish Cup loss to Celtic. Motherwell are speaking with lawyers due to objection to a Scottish FA fine for a video posted on social media.

A 2-0 European qualifying first-leg defeat in Kosovo last week was rightly sufficient to send Hibs fanatics into the internet's version of orbit. Such results stopped being a shock long ago.

Certain clubs do actually have reasons to be cheerful. Celtic's signing of Kasper Høgh for a club record fee not only demonstrated the kind of fiscal muscle-flexing that supporters wish happened more often but provided the most intriguing transfer arrival of the close season. Scepticism exists over the ability of players to perform outside the perennially successful environment of Bodø/Glimt.

Without such doubts and at a fee which even many Championship clubs would think little of, Høgh would have moved long ago. The 25-year-old, though, has a physical profile and direct style that should succeed in Scotland.

Celtic's challenge is to replace existing first-team performers - Arne Engels and Alistair Johnston the prime examples - should irresistible bids arrive without posting the kind of net profit that makes balance sheets look more important than trophies. Fans have rightly welcomed the Høgh signing but need more.

Rangers, in contrast to their oldest foes, have burned through extraordinary amounts of cash in recent years while generally watching others lift trophies. In McInnes, Rangers - who kick off the season at Dundee United today - have a manager whose knowledge of club and culture looks better

The leading clubs have been moot on a big picture that was exposed at a World Cup

placed than most before him in recent years to lay gloves on Celtic. Vanja Dragojevic looks a smart midfield signing from Partizan Belgrade. Rangers need attacking spark yet it should be no surprise that McInnes's first act was to implement a stronger core. This version of Rangers should be much improved. Yet on the simple basis of course and distance specialism, Celtic remain the title favourites.

Nobody linked to Hearts should have been expected by now to fully process the circumstances in which they came within minutes of a first title win in 66 years, only for that dream to be snatched away. McInnes's departure for Rangers, the completely new style implemented by Wouter Vrancken and a raising of expectations all contribute to a period of upheaval.

Hearts' tilt at glory came earlier than anyone could anticipate. A comprehensive Champions League qualifying defeat by Sturm Graz showed the scale of work Vrancken has ahead of him. Patience, however, would be wise.

Motherwell's work with and post the management of Jens Berthel Askou proved those below the Premiership's biggest fish needn't only cling on for dear life. The football was superb, the attendance figures boosted and a broader market was impressed. Sales of Elijah Just and Elliot Watt for multimillion-pound fees completely justify a club model that thinks outside the box.

St Mirren have clear aspirations of introducing more young players and a more alluring brand of football. Kilmarnock displayed that at the end of last season under Neil McCann. Aberdeen will surely be a stronger force this time under Stephen Robinson.

Only one artificial pitch remains in Scotland's top flight, which provides cause for celebration.

Football remains a Scottish obsession. It is also undeniably a sick patient. The dawning of a fresh season should appeal only if there is a glimpse of fresh thinking.

Football In brief

Chelsea

Lacroix finalises switch to Stamford Bridge

Maxence Lacroix has joined Chelsea from Crystal Palace to become the club's fifth signing of the summer. The France international, who won the FA Cup and Conference League with Palace, has been the Blues' main defensive target of the window. The 26-year-old Lacroix has signed a six-year deal with Xabi Alonso's side. **PA Media**

Manchester City

Stones agrees two-year contract with Inter

John Stones has joined Inter on a two-year contract, the Serie A club have announced. The England centre-back was a free agent after leaving Manchester City and had attracted interest from clubs across Europe. The 32-year-old ended his 10-year stay at City in June. He made 295 appearances for the club after joining from Everton for £47.5m in 2016 and won six Premier League titles, three FA Cups and a Champions League title. **PA Media**

Inter

Arsenal to kick off against Birmingham

WSL champions Manchester City, who have added the former Arsenal forward Beth Mead and Chelsea defender Niamh Charles to their ranks, begin their title defence against Birmingham. The Midlands side were promoted alongside Charlton and Crystal Palace with the top flight expanding to 14 teams for the first time. **Suzanne Wrack**

How one summer led to Howe losing control

Carabao Cup win and Champions League involvement put manager in box seat but bloated squad and Isak sale led to disquiet, says **Louise Taylor**



Last September, David Hopkinson, just installed as Newcastle's chief executive, perched on a stool at a table in Shearer's Bar at St James' Park and between sips of zero alcohol lager, likened Eddie Howe to Bruce Springsteen. According to Hopkinson, Newcastle's manager was "the Boss" and "the talent". He conjured up an imaginary scene involving Springsteen asking for M&M's before a concert and being duly supplied with a dressing room overflowing with the confectionery. The same principle, he said, would apply to "Eddie", who would be furnished with "whatever he wants".

Six months later, things had changed. In late March, Hopkinson sat around a heavy wooden table in a St James' Park boardroom and, between sips of coffee, said he did not "have a stance on the manager's future". What he could tell assembled reporters was that a recent home defeat by Sunderland "hurt". It "resonated" and was being taken "seriously". Given that Newcastle had just lost a Champions League tie 8-3 to Barcelona on aggregate and were en route to finishing 12th in the Premier League, Howe admitted to "sleepless nights" before a summit with the club's majority Saudi Arabian ownership the following month.

The 48-year-old, who only a year earlier had choreographed Newcastle's Carabao Cup triumph, securing their first domestic trophy since 1955, would win that particular battle. Thanks to a convincing, typically articulate presentation detailing his future tactical plans, Howe was allowed by the visitors from Riyadh to remain in the job he had occupied since November 2021. Even then, however, he suspected he was losing a war that had begun long before Hopkinson's installation.

It was an often subliminal conflict about power and control that started when Amanda Staveley, the club's former co-owner, was ousted in the summer of 2024. Howe had been very much Staveley's appointment and, given that she was then responsible for running the club on a daily basis, he was permitted considerable say in buying and selling players.

When Paul Mitchell, who succeeded Dan Ashworth as sporting director, suggested alterations to transfer policy and playing style, Howe made his displeasure plain. Within a year Mitchell left. It was June 2025 and with the League Cup won three months earlier the manager had never seemed more secure. Yet that exit of a second sporting director arguably prefaced Howe's downfall.

Admittedly, it was not his fault Alexander Isak forced a £125m move to Liverpool last summer, but Howe was heavily involved in Newcastle signing £240m of largely underachieving talent in a forlorn attempt to compensate. If neither the £69m Nick Woltemade nor the £55m Yoane Wissa were suitable replacements for Isak, Jacob Ramsey and Anthony Elanga often underwhelmed. Only the central defender Malick Thiaw impressed.

Moreover, it had not gone

Season by season

2021-22 The firefighter

After taking over from Steve Bruce, Howe gets strong backing in the January window and guides Newcastle to 11th. A run of six straight home wins makes the Magpies the first Premier League team to avoid relegation after failing to win any of their first 14 matches.

2022-23 Return to Europe

Alexander Isak arrives for big money and Howe's side power to the League Cup final, which ends in defeat to Manchester United. But they respond well, earning a fourth-place finish to qualify for the Champions League.

2023-24 Injuries bite

Newcastle finish bottom of their Champions League group and struggle with injuries. They also lose £55m signing Sandro Tonali to a betting ban. A late run earns seventh spot but European hopes are dashed as Manchester United stun City in the FA Cup final.

2024-25 League Cup triumph

A Dan Burn-inspired win over Liverpool at Wembley ends Newcastle's long trophy drought. With Isak banging in 23 league goals, they secure fifth place and Champions League qualification.

2025-26 The ghost of Isak

A summer-long saga over the sale of Isak to Liverpool scuppers plans for Howe's fourth full season in charge. The fans turn on wantaway Anthony Gordon midway through a campaign that is all but ended by a humiliating 7-2 defeat at Barcelona in March. Howe's final five months feature 14 defeats. **Tom Bassam**

unnoticed in Riyadh that Howe's unwillingness to sell players exacerbated the ownership's financial problems at a time when Newcastle's comparatively low commercial revenues made it a struggle to remain within football's spending rules. In May, the club entered a Uefa settlement agreement after breaching European investment rules last season. It dictates they must balance the books very carefully for the next three years and explains why their latest sporting director, Ross Wilson, sold Anthony Gordon and Sandro Tonali to Barcelona and Tottenham respectively this summer. Howe was reluctant to lose the pair and became dismayed at the prospect of seeing another key individual in Bruno Guimarães depart for Arsenal.

Wilson, who arrived from Nottingham Forest in October, has presided over a marked policy pivot involving signing young players possessing high resale potential. Hopkinson has boasted that Newcastle are aiming to be one "of the best clubs in the world" by 2030 but Howe is not the only one to have detected a disconnect between such lofty expectations and a bold experiment with youth that could easily go badly wrong. Well aware he had remained at Bournemouth a season too long before being sacked in 2020, it seems Howe decided it would be better to jump rather than be pushed, and leave on amicable terms.

In five years on Tyneside, he improved some players almost beyond recognition - Joelinton and Jacob Murphy in particular - and choreographed an often thrilling brand of football during two Champions League campaigns. At their high tempo, hard-pressing best, Newcastle were gloriously entertaining, but Howe's team became frequently poor in possession and adept at forfeiting leads. Pace and athleticism seemed prioritised ahead of vision and incision. Like their workaholic manager, Newcastle increasingly resembled a team that had forgotten how to relax and read the game's nuances.

Howe is gifted enough, intelligent enough and young enough to reach the highest echelons of coaching but first he needs to rest, reassess and, perhaps, remember why he once fell in love with Arsenal's football during their Cesc Fàbregas-inspired tiki-taka phase. The irony of his Newcastle tenure is that a manager obsessed with off-field control came undone partly by its absence on the pitch.

It is a paradox Howe may reflect on as he sits at his treasured piano and creates some new mood music of his own.

Howe was involved in signing £240m of underachieving talent to compensate for selling Isak

Newcastle split amicably with Howe

Continued from back page

manager appeared to have convinced PIF to offer him another chance during a meeting in April.

He is understood to have reiterated his commitment to the job after returning from holiday in June but subsequently became disenchanted by the events of a turbulent summer. Quite apart from the exits of Gordon and Tonali, it has featured doubt surrounding the future of the Brazil midfielder Bruno Guimarães, who is said to be closing in on an £80m move to Arsenal.

At Bristol City on Wednesday night, Howe admitted he had "lost control" of transfers and did not know if Guimarães would board the team's flight to south-east Spain before a training camp at La Manga today.

While Guimarães is understood to have told Newcastle he wants to join Arsenal this summer, Howe had developed increasing reservations about a new, PIF approved, policy of signing largely young players with high resale potential priced, broadly, in the £20m-£40m bracket. With Newcastle operating under a Uefa settlement agreement, Wilson believes it is the best way to remain within football's spending rules.

The sporting director has recruited four promising yet inexperienced players aged 20 or under in Ewen



◀ **Eddie Howe** in May, as Newcastle ended in 12th place
MIKE EGERTON/PA

Jaissle heads for St James' Park on a wave of Saudi success

Attack-minded German won consecutive Asian Champions Leagues for Al-Ahli where he managed Toney and Mahrez

John Duerden

Taking over a big, underachieving port city club with a loyal fanbase that is desperate for success should not faze Matthias Jaissle. Should he take the role vacated by Eddie Howe, the 38-year-old German will leave Jeddah as a hero and arrive in the north-east as one of the most successful coaches in the history of Asian football.

A decade younger than Howe, Jaissle has achieved plenty, not only surviving in a Saudi Pro League that chews through coaches at a rapid rate but emerging victorious. It also helps that Al-Ahli and Newcastle share the same Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) owners.

Newcastle fans may know little about the former centre-back, whose playing career was cut short by injury, but that was also the case in Saudi Arabia when he arrived three years ago. Austria's Bundesliga is not followed much in Asia, so two titles won with RB Salzburg did not mean a great deal: neither did Jaissle's association with Ralf Rangnick.

Fans were more focused on Al-Ahli's recent return to the top flight, after a first season in the second tier, and were contemplating an influx of big-name players. A little different to the situation at St James' Park with

stars such as Sandro Tonali and Anthony Gordon already gone and others seemingly about to follow.

In Jeddah, Riyad Mahrez, Roberto Firmino, Édouard Mendy, Franck Kessié and others arrived in a summer when the club was acquired by PIF. For a team that had been in the doldrums a year earlier, it was quite a turnaround.

Despite all that Al-Ahli may have been the perfect club for Jaissle. The fans are famously passionate but had only one domestic league win since 1984. In Asia there had been two comprehensive Champions League final defeats. Compared to Al-Hilal, Al-Nassr and Al-Ittihad - also in the PIF stable - the Green corner of Jeddah had been relatively starved of success and, for a while, challenging again was enough.

For the then 35-year-old, dealing with such names did not seem a problem. His straight-talking style, with the foreign stars treated the same as the locals, drew a positive response. With his wealth of attacking talent Jaissle tried to win possession as high as possible to give players such as Mahrez the chance to shine. His preferred attack-minded, high-intensity playing style may move up a gear by the North Sea compared to the heat and humidity of the Red Sea.

In his first season Al-Ahli finished third, 11 points ahead of their fierce local rivals Al-Ittihad and, crucially, qualified for the AFC Champions League Elite. The second season was more difficult, for a while at least. After the departure of Allan Saint-Maximin, Jaissle wanted a replacement winger but, instead, Ivan Toney was signed and the England striker started slowly. Results dipped but



▲ Little known coach Matthias Jaissle has won over fans of Al-Ahli
NOUSHAD THEKKAYIL/NURPHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

were improving by January 2025 when the axe threatened to fall. Max Allegri was ready to take over, the kind of eye-catching coach that fans often want. But not in this

case - members of the Green Army supported Jaissle, who had always taken time out to praise and talk to fans. A group of them appeared at the training ground with banners telling club management they should be the ones to go.

And it worked. Al-Ahli said Jaissle was staying with their full support. In came a winger, Galeno from Porto, and with the Brazilian getting the best out of Toney, Al-Ahli moved up a gear. They finished fifth in Jaissle's second season but got more points. It was all about the Champions League, however. In the semi-finals, they defeated Al-Hilal, 19-time Saudi and four-time Asian winners. Then, in May 2025, in front of 60,000 fans in Jeddah, Kawasaki Frontale of Japan were defeated.

Then Al-Ahli did it again, winning the Asian title for a second time last May to become the first team since their Jeddah rivals, Al-Ittihad (in 2004 and 2005), to clinch successive Champions League crowns.

They also had a title challenge at home that only faded in the final weeks with Toney scoring 32 goals. In 34 games the team collected 81 points, 14 more than the previous season, and had Al-Nassr and Al-Hilal not been so consistent then it could have been a spectacular double.

The focus for the new season, due to start next month, was all about the Saudi Pro League title; but that should be someone else's concern now.

Jaissle was recently linked with Al-Hilal and while that wouldn't have gone down well with fans in Jeddah, he heads to Newcastle with the blessing of most. The German was always likely to return to Europe, and departs having won major titles. Many more experienced coaches have failed in that regard. Newcastle will be a different and tougher challenge.

He is not part of the elite any more but taking Newcastle closer to the Premier League's top four would be a good start.

Direction of travel cost manager his job

When Eddie Howe was appointed by Newcastle in November 2021, the club was 19th in the Premier League with no wins after 11 games. He steered them to 11th by the end of the campaign, and they finished 12th last season.

At some clubs there would have been little deviation across that period. Crystal Palace, for example, have ended every one of the previous 13 seasons between 10th and 15th in the Premier League. For Newcastle under Howe, the journey was rather more scenic.

As he prepares his CV for his next job application, the 48-year-old would be wise to highlight that only four teams earned more Premier League points during his time in the Newcastle hot seat. Three clubs had a better goal difference across the 179-match period, all of whom have won the title within the past three seasons.

You'll never sing that? Well,

quite. As much as this might be the fairest way to assess a manager's tenure, football doesn't work like

Newcastle were fifth best in the Premier League under Eddie Howe

Premier League points while Howe was in charge of Newcastle

Manchester City	399
Arsenal	381
Liverpool	363
Aston Villa	295
Newcastle	290
Manchester United	289
Chelsea	276
Tottenham Hotspur	260
Brighton	258
Brentford	241
Crystal Palace	225
West Ham United	207
Everton	205
Wolves	184

Source: Opta. Note: ever-present clubs shown only

this. It's what you deliver between August and May that determines how you are remembered.

The clear highlight of Howe's reign (in the league) was finishing fourth in 2022-23. The miracle of Leicester's title aside, no other team from outside England's established big six clubs had taken a top four berth since Everton in 2004-05. Newcastle last finished so high in the table in the days of Sir Bobby Robson.

But their 12th place in 2025-26 was also worse than the club performed in several campaigns in the Mike Ashley era. That was always going to be hard to defend given the club's budget under Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

Howe could point to a degree of misfortune in his final season. Injuries hit hard, with Harvey Barnes, Aaron Ramsdale and Malick Thiaw the only players included in their matchday squad for all 38

Premier League games. Apart from the latter player and Sandro Tonali, nobody else made more than 27 league starts; no other side in the division had so few players reach this arbitrary benchmark.

There was also underperformance at both ends of the pitch. Newcastle scored 4.1 goals fewer than their expected goals implied they should have, while they conceded 3.7 above their xG at the back. If the league were decided by Opta's expected points metric, the Magpies would have finished ninth.

That would have been about par. The available wage data suggests Newcastle have the eighth-highest salary bill in the Premier League and that has been their average finishing position under Howe. He delivered two Champions League campaigns, several very famous nights at St James' Park and a first major trophy in decades. **Andrew Beasley**

Jaouen, Bazoumana Touré, Aladjji Bamba and Sean Steur. Howe feared expectations had been raised earlier this year when his chief executive David Hopkinson claimed he wanted Newcastle to "be in the conversation" about the identity of the best clubs in the world by 2030. Howe told friends things "no longer felt right".

After succeeding Steve Bruce as manager in November 2021 he led Newcastle to two Carabao Cup finals and in winning the second - against Liverpool - last year secured the club's first significant domestic silverware for 70 years.

With his assistant, Jason Tindall, also expected to leave, the squad are likely to be placed under the caretaker charge of first team coach, Graeme Jones, for the trip to La Manga.

'I'm emotional'
Vollering on
weight pressure
and climbing
Mont Ventoux



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Clean and jerk
Campbell vows
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Friday
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Sport

Fifa's sales pitch More tournaments, more debt and higher ticket prices

No mention of the women's game in 25-page prospectus produced by JP Morgan

Exclusive
Matt Hughes

Fifa's sales pitch to persuade members to approve the sale of the World Cup's commercial rights clearly states that its plans for financial growth will be achieved by staging more tournaments, having higher ticket prices and debt financing.

A 25-page sales deck titled "Fifa Forward Enterprise Member Materials", that has been seen by the Guardian, makes the case for the creation of a new company to run

Fifa's commercial operations, 20% of which would be sold to Joshua Kushner, a US investor who is the brother of Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

The prospectus has been produced by JP Morgan, the US bank that was also behind the failed European Super League breakaway five years ago.

In addition to the previously reported \$20m (£15m) sign-up payment Fifa has offered to all 211 member associations, which could be made available as soon as January, the document projects that the four-year Fifa Forward payments would increase to \$24m for each member by the 2035-39 cycle.

JP Morgan makes clear in the sales deck that such growth will come from "a growing tournament portfolio", "third party sources of capital and debt financing", and prioritising "high yield" partnerships and events.

There is also a reference to more than doubling the number of global tournaments held each year, from 200 to 450, which if followed through would put a huge strain on player workload.

Staging the World Cup more frequently would be the most obvious way of raising revenue, with Gianni Infantino having previously proposed making it a biennial tournament five years ago.

The bank also raises the prospect of TV coverage of the biggest events such as the World Cup being sold to subscription channels or streamers, by referring to

Uefa threat Europe ready to boycott all Fifa competitions

Page 1 →



Jaissle waiting in the wings as Howe exits Newcastle

Louise Taylor

Eddie Howe has left Newcastle after losing control of transfers and is likely to be replaced by the German coach Matthias Jaissle, who is in charge of the Saudi Arabian club Al-Ahli.

Although the timing of Howe's abrupt departure after almost five years in charge at St James' Park is unexpected, his position had been uncertain for some time. He is understood to have told Newcastle's Saudi Arabian owners he wanted to leave more than a fortnight ago and the parting is said to be "amicable". Sources have suggested the 48-year-old told directors he was utterly drained and wanted to take a break from football after a transformative

Tyneside tenure in which Newcastle won the League Cup in 2025 and twice qualified for the Champions League.

In recent months, Howe has become disillusioned after seeing his previously strong powerbase and ability to dictate transfer policy diminished significantly. Already this summer Ross Wilson, the third sporting director of his managerial tenure, has presided over the sale of Anthony Gordon and Sandro Tonali to Barcelona and Tottenham respectively. A year ago the team's key striker Alexander Isak departed for Liverpool.

Not that Howe gave any indication of the events about to unfold after Wednesday night's 4-1 pre-season

friendly defeat at Bristol City. "Every day as Newcastle manager is a great day for me," he said. "I absolutely love the football club and that will never change. There has been a lot of change at the football club and potentially more to come. [But] I think there's always reasons to be optimistic. I believe great things are possible every season. I see no reason for it to be any different this year."

Yesterday morning the Newcastle hierarchy's negotiations with Jaissle were said to be at an advanced stage. Given that Al-Ahli are also owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, Jaissle's split from his club is unlikely to prove problematic.

The 38-year-old had a brief playing career as a defender with Hoffenheim and has been in charge of Al-Ahli since 2023. Along the way he has won a Saudi Super Cup and two Asian Champions Leagues. In his first major head coaching role, at RB Salzburg, he won two league titles and the Austrian Cup in two seasons.

After Newcastle finished a disappointing 12th in the Premier League last season some fans were calling for Howe's dismissal but the former Bournemouth

Not so black and white: how Eddie Howe lost control at Newcastle
Louise Taylor Page 42 →*

Root back as captain under new Test coach Fleming

'An outstanding leader'
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